ROOTS OF DOMINATION: POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES IN SYRIA FROM THE FRENCH MANDATE TO HAFIZ AL-ASAD

by

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

The history of modern Syria is often divided into brief periods, relating to a specific topic, such as authoritarianism in the early years of independence, the emergence of nationalism after the end of World War I, and so on. This thesis is the end result of a careful reading and application of two particular assertions made by the late Albert Hourani, specifically that, as historians, we often divide up the past into somewhat perilous periodisiations; and that even if there were no 'Syrian' people, the Syrian lands would still be ripe with problems. Thus, this thesis examines the effects of rule by non-Syrians, then traces these effects through the first thirty years of independence. These 'non-Syrians,' especially the French, made several broken promises, which led to a very specific desire to see Syria ruled by Syrians. While the rule of the various military governments and their successors from 1946-1969 was by no means free of strife, it could be argued that by 1970 the only option for any semblance of security and stability was the authoritarian rule of Hafiz al-Asad. The present work is an attempt to break up the periodisations to show that indeed, whether under French or Ottoman control, Syrian politics were problematic, and, unfortunately, a precursor to the repressive regime that has been in place in the country since 1970.

Dedicated to my father, to whom I owe my deep-rooted fascination with history.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION

To ensure simplicity, I have rendered Arabic and Turkish names and words into familiar forms. Though commonly spelled Feisal and Hussein, I use Faysal and Husayn and less common words and translations into Arabic have been italicized. Translations from French are my own, unless otherwise noted.

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I would like to thank the members of my committee, Peter Sluglett, Peter von Sivers, and Hakan Yavuz, who took the time to read this thesis. I would also like to thank Asaad Al-Saleh for his tireless dedication to the students of the Middle East Center at the University of Utah, and for the role he has personally played in my development as a young scholar of the Middle East. I owe a substantial amount of thanks to Peter Sluglett, without whom this project may never have actually began. He introduced me to the intricacies of Syrian history nearly two years ago, and I have been enamored with the region ever since. Above all else, he is an excellent mentor and teacher, who never refuses to help, no matter how tedious the questions and requests may be. For all of this, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and wish him the very best.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The late Albert Hourani once wrote that "It is a commonplace that we cut up history into periods at our peril: the artificial frontiers made for convenience may seem to be real, and a new generation of historians will have to spend time removing them."[1] He goes on to explain that even though they can be "perilous," these divisions do in fact aid historians in their attempts to reconstruct the past: "Nevertheless, to think we must distinguish, and the best we can do is to try to make divisions which reveal something important about the process we are studying."[2] Though they do aid historians in their attempts to understand the past, they are far less useful for anyone attempting to explore the nature of power and authority in the region of *Bilad al-Sham*, or Greater Syria, from the Ottoman Empire to the present state of affairs. The common divisions, 'Late-Ottoman Syria,' 'Faysal's Syria,' 'Mandate Syria,' 'post-Mandate Syria,' and finally 'modern Syria,' seem to imply that there is no historical connection between these periods and that marked historical divisions are a natural occurrence. This assertion could not be farther from the truth. No matter who has been at the top of Syrian politics, the Sultan or the French High Commissioner, there exists a commonality among all forms of government.

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[1] Albert Hourani, 'Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables,' William Polk and Richard Chambers, *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: The Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), 41.
[2] Ibid.

This is the fact that, despite experiments with and the implementation of ideas of 'democracy' or 'popular sovereignty,' power has always remained in the hands of a very select few individuals, and at times, most notably since 1970, in the hands of a single individual.

Surely classifying the French Mandate as authoritarian would be a historical error, but there are surprising similarities in the ways the French and the Asad regime(s), as well as the late-Ottoman rulers and the countless governments between 1946-1970, sought to reign in control over their 'subjects.' As Hourani has also argued, "Even if there were no Syrian people a Syrian problem would still exist. Syria owes its political importance less to the qualities of its population than to its geographical position."[3] This quote, while distinctly referring to the Syrians themselves, can also be utilized in a different context, one that looks at who is at the top of the Syrian political hierarchy. Thus this thesis is an attempt to break down the barriers that exist between the periods of Syria's recent history in an attempt to show that, despite the difficulties associated with trying to describe some one 180 years of history with a single phrase, there have been noticeable historical currents in Syrian history, especially as they relate to the concept of authority and power.

It is commonplace and well accepted to assert that modern Syria cannot be fully understood without some probing into its recent history. Often, however, works on Syria relegate these historical analyses to introductory chapters, while the bulk of the work is related to the specific period in question. This work is by no means a definitive study, and due to its length will focus on a specific selection of events throughout the last century and a half of Syrian history. As Hourani asserts in *Syria and Lebanon*, before Syria's

[3] Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 6.

more recent history can be understood, one must attempt to understand how Syria arrived in the twenty-first century (or, in his case, the twentieth). Thus, this thesis will begin with a brief explanation of Syria under the late Ottoman Empire; it will then move to Syria's position in World War I and the French Mandate; and conclude with an analysis of 'modern' Syria, specifically from independence in 1946 to the late twentieth century and the chaotic political history of this time period.

It is perhaps not quite accurate to label French administration in Syria from 1922-1946 as 'authoritarian,' as the term itself carries several connotations that are not easily applied to the French colonial system, although it is true that the French seem to have had a somewhat limited understanding of the principle that the mandate was an essentially temporary and transitional arrangement, though one is hard-pressed to deny the lasting impact and the moral implications of the concept of *Mission Civilasatrice.* From their writings it is clear that most French officials shared the notion that they were taking part in a 'civilizing mission' of some kind. What many of them failed to realize, however, was that however backward it may have seemed to the colonizers, Syria was in fact a country with a rich historical tradition, dating back to the earliest years of Islam. Damascus and Aleppo, two of the major cities of Syria, are among the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, and remain vibrant cultural centers to this day. Current events in the Middle East, including the recent uprisings in Syria, have redirected attention to the authoritarian nature of the postcolonial states of the Middle East. Saddam Husayn, ousted from Iraq in 2003, was a brutal and cruel dictator, but he was by no means the only one. The rule of Hafiz al-Asad in Syria from 1970 to his death in 2000 was characterized by brutal repression and the development of an expansive network of control and

domination. His son, Bashar, is now facing what are evidently the most serious threats to the regime since the Hama uprisings in 1982.

What, then, is the purpose of this thesis? In the following pages, I hope to elaborate on the idea that periodisations, especially in this case, are indeed perilous and often can lead to the false understanding that natural historical boundaries exist throughout Syrian history. Obviously Ottoman Syria was quite different from Mandate Syria, but it is historically inaccurate to view them as two entirely different historical entities. The French Mandate authorities inherited a new country, which had previously been part of the vast Ottoman Empire, and therefore they had to deal with a pre-existing social and political structure. On the other side, while there was a concentrated effort to get rid of the French, especially during the last years of the Mandate, French culture and politics had a significant impact on Syria in the mid-twentieth century.[4] Essentially, French imperialism in Syria, itself a form of authoritarianism by a different name, has to be seen as part of a continuous process of political developments that began with the imposition of the *Tanzimat* reforms by the Ottoman government in 1839.

Literature Review

As mentioned, this is by no means a definitive study, but rather a springboard for further research into authoritarianism in the history of Syria. There have been numerous works on this subject within Syrian historiography, perhaps most notably Lisa Wedeen's *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, Nikolaos Van Dam's *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society under Asad*

[4] For an excellent analysis of how Syrians, mostly Aleppines, sought to assert and ascertain their own identities under the Mandate, see Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

and the Ba'th Party, Steven Heydemann's *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946-1970*, and Raymond Hinnebusch's *Syria: Revolution from Above.*[5] Literature on the French Mandate is just as plentiful, and the landmark work of Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* is unparalleled in its archival sources and attention to detail. Elizabeth Thompson's *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* is yet another significant contribution to the field, as Thompson disentangles the complicated web of cooperation and competition among mass-movements in a nuanced historical analysis. Of perhaps unparalleled quality is her analysis of the part played by gender under the French Mandate. Michael Provence's *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* is an invaluable study of the first major uprising against French Mandate authority and its impact on Syrian and Arab nationalist thought.

Finally, the works of Abdul Karim-Rafeq, which are too numerous to list, need to be mentioned for their significant contribution to the study of Syria under the Ottoman Empire.[6] A recent volume, edited by Peter Sluglett and Stefan Weber, contains several original pieces on the state of Syria, and *Bilad al-Sham*, under the Ottomans.[7] A significant amount of attention has been paid to the literature on French imperialism, and a conscious effort has been made to ascertain the French perspective on this matter. For that, there is perhaps no better source than a brief article written by General Gouraud, 'La

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[5] See bibliography for complete references.
[6] See, for example, *The Province of Damascus*
[7] Here it should be clarified what exactly the term 'Syria' refers to. In this study, 'Syria' will refer to the geographical area created after World War I with its present boundaries. When referring to 'historical' Syria, the region extending from the Tauris Mountains south to Sinai and from the Mediterranean east to Northern Mesopotamia and the eastern Syrian Desert, the terms 'historical Syria' and *Bilad al-Sham* will be used interchangeably.

France en Syrie,' which was published in 1922 in *Revue de France.* Furthermore, works by Hourani, Henri Brunschwig, Peter Shambrook, Christopher Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, Stephen Roberts, and William Shorrock all provide good starting points for excursions into the history of French colonial policy.[8] As with any study of the nature of politics in Syria, Patrick Seale's classic *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*, has proven to be an excellent guide through the development of authoritarian rule in the country.

Theoretical Background

Inherent in any study of the outcomes of the mandate system imposed on the people of Greater Syria and the rest of the Arab Middle East after World War I is a study of Arab, perhaps in this case Syrian, nationalism. Thus, what follows is a brief explanation of the more common views on the emergence of nationalism in the Middle East.

Albert Hourani argues that distinct modes of nationalism emerged in the Middle East around the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. One mode of nationalism was one closely associated with European nationalist movements, particularly the sense of community and patriotism among all those who inhabited the same piece of land. This mode, as Hourani argues, was particularly marked in regions of the Middle East where communities had inhabited the same definable areas over a

[8] See William I. Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976); Peter A. Shambrook, *French Imperialism in Syria, 1927-1936* (Reading, UK: Garnett Publishing Ltd., 1999); Stephen H. Roberts, *History of French Colonial Policy, 1870-1925* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1929); Christopher M. Andrew and A. S. Kanya-Forstner. *The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981); Henri Brunschwig, Henri. *French Colonialism, 1871-1914: Myths and Realities* (New York, Washington and London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964).

significant amount of time such as Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, and Lebanon.[9] Finally, Hourani points to what he considers the strongest mode of nationalism in the Middle East, ethnic and linguistic nationalism, which is based on the idea of the continuity of all who spoke the same language and live in the same space. Furthermore, this new community professed the desire to form an independent political entity.[10] This desire to form a new political entity was presented in several different ways. As will be discussed below, during the latter years of Ottoman rule in Syria, two distinct currents developed in early nationalist thought; those (relatively few) who sought complete independence for the Arab provinces from the Empire; and those who, noting the less desirable alternative of European control, expressed a desire to reinstitute constitutional rule, limit the powers of the Sultan, and ensure autonomy *within* the framework of the Empire for the provinces.

Just as there were numerous provinces within the Arab regions of the Empire, so too were there divergent currents of Arab nationalism. Syrian nationalism centered around an insistence on the notion of Greater Syria, which had existed since the rise of Islam, playing a vital role in its spread dating to the presence of the Umayyad Caliphate in Damascus. There was also a distinct brand of Lebanese nationalism, principally espoused by the Maronites, who appealed to their 'Phoenician heritage' as a basis for national unity and independence. Egyptian nationalism, perhaps best personified by Sa'd Zaghlul, insisted that the British leave Egypt, which they had occupied in 1882, and leave

[9] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (London and New York: Oxford University Press), 342.
[10] Ibid. For a discussion of some early of Syrian 'nationalist' groups, see pp. 26-27 below.

Egypt for the Egyptians.[11] Furthermore, despite its later association with the Ba'th party, Iraqi nationalism, to a certain extent, carried with it overtones of its historical connection to the greatness characterized by Babylon, as immortalized by Saddam Husayn's obsession with Nebuchadnezzar.[12]

Ethnic and linguistic nationalism is found throughout the work of Sati' al-Husri. Husri argued in favor of the unification of all Arab lands, especially after the disastrous 1948-49 war in Palestine. To further his argument for the unification of Arab lands, Husri explained that the seven Arab states had lost the 1948-49 war in Palestine simply because they were seven *separate* states.[13] Furthermore, he viewed the postwar states as "artificial creations of imperialist powers" meant to keep the Arabs politically, militarily, and culturally weak.[14] Husri was by no means the only theorist of Arab nationalism, but he is certainly one of the most important writers on the subject.

Husri's ideas, and those of the founder of Ba'thism, Michel 'Aflaq, were heavily influenced by European, and especially German, political thought. Husri advocated a universal and (Arab) state-run educational program that would emphasize a history that resonated with Arab nationalist thought.[15] He also adopted a German definition of the term 'nation', maintaining that a nation should be based on the unity of a linguistic community and a coherent history, so that, regardless of an individual's personal preferences, language and history determine national identity.[16] Thus, for Husri, the Arab

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[11] Selma Botman, *Egypt From Independence to Revolution: 1919-1952* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 26-27.
[12] See Eric Davis, *Memories of State: Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
[13] See Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 3.
[14] Ibid., 3.
[15] Ibid., 64.
[16] Ibid.

nation was predetermined and eternal, the basic tenets of primordialist thought on nationalism. Given the absurdity and the a-historical nature of such ideas it is surprising that they gained such wide acceptance.

Discussing the importance of language to Arab nationalism, Husri explained that "language is the most important spiritual tie which binds an individual to the rest of mankind because it is the medium of communication amongst individuals."[17] He also explained the importance of history in the construction of the nation: "nationalist feeling depends on historical memories more than anything else" and has a "great impact on the direction of historical events….Love for independence is nourished by memories of the lost independence…faith in the future of the nation derives its strength from a belief in the brilliance of the past; and the longing for unification is increased by the renewal of memories of the past unity."[18] Thus, for Husri, Arabs were almost destined to unite under the banner of Arab nationalism simply because history told them to do so, which seems to show a certain ignorance of history, as the region had been neither united nor ruled by Arabs for several hundred years, certainly since well before the Ottoman period. The primordial sentiments that ran through the blood of every Arabic speaking individual would eventually unite all Arabs in the culmination of this grand narrative of a glorious past.

Another proponent of Arab nationalism central to this examination is the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party, simply known as the Ba'th Party. Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar founded the party in the turbulent 1940s with an ideology based on its Syrian predecessors, The League of National Action, the National Arab Party, and the

[17] Quoted in Ibid., 66.
[18] Quoted in Ibid., 67.

Arab Socialist Party. Essentially, the ideals of all three parties were combined into the ideology of the Ba'th Party.[19] The founding members of these two groups outlined a four-part ideology, specifically that the Arabs are one nation; the Arabs have one natural leader, a political-religious one; Arabism was a matter of national consciousness; and finally that the Arab "was the master of his own fate."[20] 'Aflaq and Bitar adopted the basics of this ideology, specifically the idea that the Arabs formed a single nation that had been unlawfully divided, first by the Ottomans and then by the Western Powers in 1918, and advocated the idea that the mission of the Ba'th Party was to "awaken the slumbering Arab nation and lead its unification."[21] While acknowledging that Islam was an important expression of Arab culture, the party propagated a secular ideology, and embraced an ideology designed to include all Arabic speakers from all religions. More specifically, Ba'thism combined Arab nationalism with a fervent populism that claimed to be profoundly hostile to the (existing) national order.[22] Of course, while Ba'thism was supposedly a pan-Arabist doctrine, party branches in the various Arab states soon acquired national labels, which partly explains the intense rivalry that would emerge between Ba'thist Syria and Ba'thist Iraq.[23]

Ba'thist ideology focused on the idea of *inqilab* (structural transformation or uprising), and 'Aflaq explained how this transformation would come about: first, the nation must be aware of its historical and social conditions; second, moral character must be present; and third, Arabs must believe that destiny, history, and the "Arab condition"

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[19] See John F. Devlin, 'The Baath Party: Rise and Metamorphosis,' *The American Historical Review* 96, no. 5 (Dec., 1991): 1396-1407.
[20] Robert W. Olson, *The Ba'th and Syria, 1947-1982, the Evolution of Ideology, Party, and State: From the French Mandate to the Era of Hafiz al-Asad* (Princeton, NJ: Kingston Press, 1982), 3.
[21] Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 30.
[22] Ibid.
[23] See Eberhard Kienle, *Ba'th vs. Ba'th: The Conflict Between Syria and Iraq 1968-1989* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990).

must be ready for the success of *inqilab*.[24] According to Ba'thist ideology, after achieving *inqilab*, a nation would see the rise of the 'trinity' of Unity, Freedom, and Socialism.[25] Along the lines of potential unification, 'Aflaq and Ba'th ideology (in a similar vein to Husri's) considered the separate Arab states to be 'regions' of a larger Arab nation and (of course) ultimately as the consequence of imperialist aggression. In a speech in 1957, 'Aflaq stated that

> Our movement sees colonialism more as a result than as a cause, a result of whatever defects and distortions adulterate our society….The atmosphere created by previous movements…was a false atmosphere which concealed from the people the reality of the problem….They did not accept that the stage of our struggle against colonialism was connected to our struggle at home. They did not understand…that the unification of the struggle was necessary, that the separation which had been imposed on our land was artificial and obstructive, and that in the hearts of the people…the falseness (of the separation) would disappear and…the fact that out nation was one would become apparent.[26]

Numerous recent studies have attempted to rewrite, or at the least reinterpret, the history of Arab nationalism, fixing its origins in popular sentiment rather than in the rarefied air of intellectual debate. Michael Provence has argued against the idea that nationalism in Syria, and the broader Middle East as well, was simply an extension of the politics of notables.[27] For Provence, Arab nationalism was not the product of elite thinkers and politicians; there was no "smoke-filled room" like those of the "Damascene nationalist elite" that served as the origin of nationalist thought. Instead, local nonelites on the Syrian periphery "worked out for themselves what it meant to be part of a larger community. Eventually, in the Syrian case**,** the countryside came to lead the city in a

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[24] Olson, 3-4.
[25] Ibid., 5.
[26] Quoted in Ibid., 9-10.
[27] This idea, found in *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, runs somewhat counter to Philip Khoury's assertions in *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860-1920.* While the studies are based on different time periods, Khoury situates Arab nationalism "in the social and political environment" of Damascus at the turn of the twentieth century, mainly as a result of the actions of a "landowning-bureaucratic class" (p. 1).

display of *national* resistance against the French."[28] There is no denying that the nationalists of southern Syria, largely concentrated in Jabal Hawran, felt that they were part of a larger Syrian nation, and "articulated their ideas in view of local conditions and local experience."[29] As with all nationalisms, there were numerous currents of Syrian nationalism, yet, as Provence shows, each evolved in a 'local' context. They all desired an end to French control, and some became more prominent than others.[30] Tracing the origins of a nationalist movement is a difficult endeavor. Often, ideologies are 'hijacked' by various groups who use them to their advantage. It could indeed be the case that Arab nationalism emerged out of the Great Syrian Revolt, but that would be to ignore the general dissatisfaction with French rule that had become painfully obvious within the first years of the Mandate.

Particular attention must also be paid to the nature of authoritarianism, a term almost universally applied to the Syrian political structure since the end of the 1950s. It can be described as the consolidation of total power in the hands of a single person, or at most a very limited number of individuals. What engenders authoritarianism? In terms of political stability, few postcolonial states qualify as 'strong states'; their political instability can be traced back to the top-down nature of the 'colonial' politics of (in this case) the mandate system. This explains why in Syria, after the end of the mandate, there was a constant search for social and political identity throughout the various processes of state formation in the interwar years. The upper echelons of the Syrian bourgeoisie failed

[28] Provence, *Great Syrian Revolt,* 48.
[29] Ibid.
[30] See ibid. A recent article by Steve Tamari posits the idea that Syrian, or Arab, national consciousness can be traced much further back than the early twentieth century, noting that scholars in the seventeenth century often referred to their home as *bilad al-'arab.* See Steve Tamari, 'Arab National Consciousness in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Syria,' in Peter Sluglett with Stefan Weber, eds., *Syria and Bilad al-Sham under Ottoman Rule: Essays in Honour of Abdul Karim Rafeq* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 309-322.

to shoulder their "proper economic and political responsibilities," which in turn helped bring about the various military coups mentioned above.[31] Another result of the top-down nature of mandate rule was the general sense of alienation and disenfranchisement shared by the growing middle class.[32] Later, Asad would use this general alienation from politics to his advantage as he seized power in a 'relatively' peaceful coup. This alienation and disenfranchisement could also be seen throughout the interwar years as the Syrian middle class looked anywhere and everywhere for social and political identity, some turning to fascism and others attempting at times to become French.[33] Most Syrians were systematically excluded from the political process following World War I as they were mostly peasants who did not pay enough taxes to be qualified to vote.[34] As a result, elections were usually rigged**,** and then often reduced to the simple formula of who-knows-who and how well. In addition, most Syrians, for whatever reasons,[35] were often removed from, and uninvolved with, the functions of state organizations and/or political institutions, and political parties failed to attract anything resembling a national following in the interwar period.[36] All these processes made it nearly impossible for the formation of *stable* political and class identities,[37] which in turn made Asad's consolidation of power after 1970 significantly easier than it would have been had there

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[31] Ibid., 98.
[32] Ibid.
[33] See Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East.*
[34] Peter Sluglett, 'The Ozymandias Syndrome: Questioning the Stability of Middle Eastern Regimes,' in Oliver Schlumberger, ed. *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 98.
[35] The French Mandate was still the effective ruling apparatus in Syria at this time, and thus the military rule and martial law ushered in by the Great Syrian Revolt in 1925 made the organization of substantial social and political organizations not explicitly approved by the French authorities difficult. One only need to look at the formation of the Ba'th Party in 1947 to see the new 'political freedom' that came with the end of the Mandate, as Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar were able to coalesce the various Syrian socialist parties of the 1940s into a single cohesive, and therefore more powerful, group.
[36] Ibid., 98-99
[37] Ibid., 99.

been a more evolutionary process of class formation and thus the development of political hierarchies.

Another element of authoritarianism that needs to be mentioned is the prominent role played by the military. While the leaders of authoritarian regimes are not always career military men, they are often heads of the military and retain close personal relationships with the upper echelons of the armed forces.[38] In the introduction to his classic study of the role of the military in politics, S.E. Finer called attention to the staggering number of independent states that suffered some sort of military intervention in their domestic politics.[39] Even though it was published nearly fifty years ago, *The Man on Horseback* continues to provide valid theoretical insights into the nature of the relationship between armed forces and political structures**.** Finer's assertion that there is a distinct class of countries whose governments fall victim to military intervention is accurate, and as he says, such countries are *sui generis*.[40] He differentiates military regimes from despotic, autocratic, and totalitarian regimes, noting that in the latter three, the military is often *subordinated* to the ruling civilian elite and rarely enjoys a prominent position in politics.

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[38] Although many are or were: Hafiz al-Asad, 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, Husni Mubarak, and 'Ali 'Abdullah Salih, for example, it would be a stretch to assert that Bashar al-Asad was a career military man, seeing that after he returned from London after the death of his brother Basil, who was the 'likely' choice to step in when Hafiz passed away, he was quickly accelerated through Syria's military hierarchy.

[39] See S.E. Finer, *The Man on Horseback: The Role of The Military in Politics* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1976), specifically 1-3. Between 1918 and the year of the first publication (1962) 26 states, all of which had been independent for over 100 years, suffered some sort of military intervention, see p. 2. For a further, although perhaps outdated, discussion of the theoretical limitations of civil-military relations, see Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1957), esp. Ch. 1, 'Officership as Profession', which deals with career military officers and the ways in which military positions become careers rather than temporary appointments. This fits nicely with Finer's explanation of military organization, as hierarchical structures are often difficult to maintain with a constantly fluctuating staff of officers.

[40] Finer, 3.

Over time, the Syrian military became subordinated to the government, simply because it became absorbed into the state apparatus. Furthermore, again echoing Finer, the military as an *independent* political force is a "distinct and peculiar phenomenon."[41] The state of politics in the modern Middle East, however, often fails to generate a homogenous definition of the term 'military regime'. One of the important characteristics of the military is its organization, for, as Finer asserts, "Even the most poorly organized or maintained [army] is far more highly and tightly structured than any civilian group."[42] While chaotic disorganization may be characteristic of military structures in the contemporary Middle East, the extent of organization underlined by Finer is precisely what has allowed militaries to enter into the fore of politics in the past.

What follows, then, is an attempt to remove the periodisations in the recent history of Syria alluded to by Hourani to show how, whether under Ottoman, French, or Syrian rule, the Syrian land has been subjected to numerous forms of authoritarian structures and military rule, even if the term 'authoritarian' is not always entirely applicable. To put it simply, Hafiz al-Asad may not have emerged as the authoritarian figure he was had France not instituted certain policies, notably the recruitment of members of 'friendly' minorities, which served to pave the way for the highly centralized and dictatorial nature of Syrian politics. This process, however, was not the only reason 'Alawis, and other minorities eventually emerged as the leading and most influential actors in the Syrian military. Furthermore, the French would likely have had a different experience had they paid attention to the initial struggles of the Ottomans to assert their

[41] Ibid., 4. As will be discussed later, the militaries of Middle East states, while often instruments of regimes, are able to exercise a great deal of autonomy as long as they do not act in direct opposition to governmental policies.
[42] Ibid., 5. Furthermore, he points to five specific characteristics of organization; centralized command, hierarchy, discipline, intercommunication, and a corresponding isolation and self-sufficiency, see 5-6.

authority over the population of *Bilad al-Sham* after the imposition of the *Tanzimat* and the ousting of Egyptian troops in the 1840s.

CHAPTER 2

SYRIA AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The Early History of *Bilad al-Sham*

According to Thomas Philipp, "Ever since the Muslim conquest, Bilad al-Sham was known as a distinct and important region, yet it never constituted an integrated legal or political entity on its own. Typically, it was either part, or even center, of a larger political entity or else it dissolved into a number or principalities, city-states etc."[1] Philipp also notes that in the late seventeenth century Bilad al-Sham, unlike Egypt, was never regarded as a single political entity, but was rather divided up into the provinces of Aleppo, Damascus, Tripoli, and Sidon. The Ottomans never combined the region of Bilad al-Sham into an *official* single entity, but administered it through a series of provincial governors and local administrators. The French, on the other hand, were eager to do so after the conclusion of World War I (and the British took Palestine and Transjordan).

This is not to assert that Ottoman rule over Bilad al-Sham was without controversy and opposition. In the introduction to his work on Ottoman rule in Syria, Dick Douwes quotes Muhammad al-Makki, a sheikh from Homs: "And they imposed a reign of injustice which was beyond description; even the rains stopped because of the

[1] Thomas Phillip, 'Identities and Loyalties in Bilad al-Sham at the Beginning of the early Modern Period, in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann, eds. *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Beirut: Ergon Verlag Würzburg, 2004), 10.

injustice done."[2] While the title of Douwes' work may be somewhat misleading in its insistence on a 'history' of oppression, there were, nonetheless, numerous instances of calculated repression and coercion on behalf of the Ottoman government aimed at controlling the territories of Bilad al-Sham.

Bilad al-Sham before the Tanzimat

In 1609 the Ottoman Province of Damascus consisted of ten separate sanjaks, or administrative divisions: Damascus, Jerusalem, Gaza, Safad, Nablus, Ajlun, Lajjun, Tadmor, Sidon and Beirut, and finally Karak and Shawbak.[3] The creation of these administrative units seems to have followed on the suppression of a revolt in Damascus, and was an attempt to create a more centralized, and hence efficient, government on behalf of the Ottomans in Istanbul. As Rafeq asserts, "[b]y establishing the administrative centres, the authorities could keep a closer watch over these diverse groups, insure the safety of the lines of communication with Egypt, and safeguard the passage of the Pilgrimage."[4]

The Pilgrimage to Mecca, especially the importance of Damascus, deserves elaboration. According to Karl Barbir, the *hajj* "provided the Ottoman state with the annual opportunity to demonstrate its temporal authority, to show its colors, to assert its identity as the paramount Islamic state."[5] This attention to the annual pilgrimage required a significant amount of administrative support, and while it shared the spotlight with its Egyptian counterpart, the caravan leaving from Damascus garnered significant attention

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[2] Dick Douwes, *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 1.
[3] See Rafeq, *The Province of Damascus, 1723-1783* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), 1.
[4] Ibid., 2.
[5] Karl Barbir, *Ottoman Rule in Damascus, 1708-1758* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 108.

from the Sublime Porte. One reason for the importance of Damascus to the Ottoman government was that many high ranking Ottoman officials, including members of the Sultan's family, accompanied the pilgrimage through Damascus. Barbir elaborates on several themes of importance to the Ottoman government in relation to the pilgrimage from Damascus; first, a significant amount of tax revenue had to be raised to fund it, which at times led to some discord; second, there was a substantial increase in the production and distribution of food before, during, and after the journey; third, in order to protect the pilgrims from raids and other inconveniences, there was a significant network of fortresses and garrisons along the route; fourth, the caravan required a significant military escort, which did not come cheaply; and finally, another escort had to be provided for the caravan on its return to Damascus.[6]

What then, does this say about Ottoman interests in Damascus? Throughout much of its history, local notables reported to and received instruction from the local Ottoman governors, who ultimately received their instruction from the Porte. The governors often faced numerous problems, as they faced pressure both from Istanbul and the local notables who, unlike themselves, were always there. There was a precarious balancing act in which these governors sought to carry out their orders while not upsetting those around them. Furthermore, the brevity of appointment for the governors, often no more than a few years, meant that they had little time to build up their own patronage networks, but rather had to incorporate the already existing framework into their administration. These local leaders were more than happy to cooperate in return for the prestige earned on both an individual and tribal level, in addition to receiving monetary compensation for

[6] For the brief explanation, see Barbir, 100, and 110-177 for explanations of the individual elements. Also see Rafeq, *Province of Damascus*, 59-76.

their endeavors. Thus, the Ottoman government had to enforce its presence, or it faced numerous problems relating to the upkeep of the caravan from Damascus. To placate the local leaders, the administration of the pilgrimage was often handed to the governor of Damascus who then distributed responsibility as he saw fit.[7] The Pilgrimage also benefitted the Ottomans from an economic standpoint. As it was heavily protected, it provided a fairly reliable means for the transport of goods. In addition to personal items, many pilgrims, who often spent months, even years, away from home, carried spices, textiles, precious stones, and coffee to trade with both on their journey and when they arrived in Mecca [8]

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Ottomans sought to control *Bilad al-Sham*, particularly Damascus. Though the lack of success of their attempts (after roughly 1750) may have been somewhat discouraging, it is noteworthy that they indeed tried to create a more centralized state of affairs within the region. Barbir emphasizes three distinct spheres in which the Ottomans sought to reassert themselves: the actual governing of the province, the containment of local groups, and the reorganization of the Pilgrimage as outlined above. Throughout this period, the Ottoman state espoused the idea of patronage as it sought to garner the support of local tribes by giving them responsibilities that included the protection of the Pilgrimage route.

To avoid transforming this analysis into an exploration into the intricacies of Ottoman rule in Syria, attention will now turn to another interesting episode of Syria's history, and another in which it was ruled by an outside force, only this time it was neither Ottoman nor French. Thus between 1831 and 1840 Syria was controlled by the

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[7] See Ibid., 110-113.

[8] See Rafeq, *Province*, 73-75. According to Rafeq, the arrival of pilgrims to Damascus had a significant effect on the city's commerce, which was stimulated almost as soon as they arrived.

forces of Muhammad ‘Ali, led by his son Ibrahim Pasha. As will be seen, a significant factor in the “Egyptian” decision to invade Syria was due in large part to its strategic position. Seeing Syria as the natural defense of Egypt’s eastern frontier, Muhammad ‘Ali’s decision seemed straightforward enough. Initially, many notables offered concessions to the Egyptians, and resistance was fairly scattered.[9] Something of a ‘*fatwa* war’ ensued, with the Ottoman government labeling Muhammad ‘Ali and his son “traitors to the state and apostates from the religion of the [Islamic] community.”[10] In return Muhammad ‘Ali obtained a *fatwa* from the Sharif of Mecca declaring the Ottoman sultan an ‘infidel’ and “unworthy of his office on account of the innovations he introduced contrary to the sacred law and of his imitation of the ways of the infidels.”[11]

Perhaps surprisingly, the immediate reception of Egyptian rule was not altogether negative. In 1833 Sultan Mahmud II acquiesced in Egyptian control of the region, which meant that Ibrahim Pasha was effectively the governor of Syria. According to Albert Hourani, the first few years of Egyptian rule “may be regarded as the beginning of the modern era for the country [Syria]. For the first time in centuries it was given a centralized government strong enough to hold separatist tendencies in check, and a system of taxation which was regular and comparatively rational, although burdensome.” Furthermore, as will be seen, greater equality was established between Muslims and non-Muslims, government funded schools were opened, and commerce and cultivation improved due to “an improved state of public order.”[12] Especially receptive to the Egyptians were local landowners, whom Ibrahim Pasha sought to co-opt through various

[9] See Tibawi, 66-67.
[10] Quited in Ibid., 67.
[11] See Ibid.
[12] Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, 29.

forms of patronage. This popularity, however, was short lived, as landowners rejected attempts to limit their authority, and peasants, as will be discussed later, fiercely resisted forced conscription.[13]

By 1839, Muhammad 'Ali's forces were positioned to march on Istanbul, a development that transformed the conflict into an international incident. Tibawi asserts that Russia hoped to see the 'Sick Man of Europe' disintegrate so it could seize what it wished, while Great Britain wished to maintain the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, partly to ensure that none of its rivals got hold of any part of it, and partly to preserve its communications with India.[14] Despite the fact that some Maronites may have felt that they had been liberated, the experience of Egyptian rule was mostly negative. Muhammad 'Ali sought to exploit whatever resources were available, often resorting to forced labor for miniscule wages. On other occasions, Egyptian leaders "seized men in the streets to work as forced labour or raided households to collect recruits for the army."[15] Schilcher relates the story of an afternoon in which ten Egyptians sought to requisition camels and seize a fugitive in the Damascus quarter of Maydan, only to have 100 Maydanis turn against them. The Egyptians returned with reinforcements, stormed the citadel, raided a Sufi compound, and seized and executed a number of men.[16]

One the other hand, according to Moshe Ma'oz, "It was, in fact, under Egyptian rule that for the first time reforms were introduced into Syria and Palestine."[17] The ten years of occupation "put an end to a long period of confusion and backwardness and

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Tibawi., 68-69.
[15] Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the 18th and 19th Centuries* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985), 46.
[16] Ibid., 46-47.
[17] Moshe Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform in Syria and Palestine, 1840-1861: The Impact of the Tanzimat on Politics and Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 12.

opened a new era in Syrian history. The bold measures carried out by Ibrahim Pasha brought about a profound change in almost every aspect of the old life, and in certain respects paved the way for the later Ottoman reforms of the Tanzimat."[18] These reforms, however, did not come without opposition.

A significant role was played by the Egyptian military in the administration of the 'new' Syria (a formula that would eventually resurface with the ill-fated UAR of 1958-1961) that led to discontent among many Damascenes and notables of the region. Furthermore, the Egyptian regime could control the local population only with the assistance of a sizeable military force, a vital component of any authoritarian government. There was a significant restructuring of the political landscape, as Syria and Palestine were placed under the supervision of a civil 'Governor-General' stationed in Damascus. The Egyptian regime initiated a policy of regular conscription, which weakened the local governments both politically and militarily.[19] Although most Syrians were not especially well-disposed towards the Egyptians, Ma'oz insists that "under the rule of Ibrahim Pasha, the Syrian population enjoyed *for the first time* considerable security of life and property, greater justice and opportunity for legal redress, and a more equable system of taxation."[20] In addition the Egyptian occupation led to the flourishing of trade and agriculture, thanks in large part to the introduction of new farming methods and new crops.[21]

The Syrians, however, were less impressed with forced conscription, higher personal taxation, the use of mosques as military barracks, and the establishment of

[18] Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform*, 12.
[19] Ibid., 14-15.
[20] Ibid., 15.
[21] Ibid., 15-16.

European consulates in Damascus and other cities, and by 1840 it seemed to many that the Egyptian occupation amounted to little more than exploitation**.** The Syrian market was opened to European textiles, which led to rising competition, and the presence of some 100,000 Egyptian soldiers drove food prices skyward. Furthermore, the Egyptians' disregard for local custom and religious culture gradually fomented discontent among those who had originally supported them. Ultimately, it was foreign intervention and assistance that forced Muhammad 'Ali to withdraw from Syria. For much of the occupation, Britain and Austria had conducted subversive operations in Lebanon, and ultimately ended up bombarding Beirut and landing troops on its shores.[22] Thus, in May 1841 Muhammad Najib Pasha arrived in Damascus to assume power, and a new era of Syrian history, the imposition of the Tanzimat in Bilad al-Sham, began.

Bilad al-Sham and the Tanzimat

The beginning of the Tanzimat is conventionally traced to the Gülhane decree, issued in November 1839 by Abdülmecid shortly after he succeeded Mahmud II in Istanbul. As Ma'oz has explained, the decree had three main areas of concern: administration and government, the welfare of the subjects, and the status of non-Muslims within the Empire.[23] According to Ussama Makdisi, the decree was issued "at a time when the Ottoman Empire lay on the brink of total collapse due to Muhammad 'Ali's imperial ambitions."[24] It had very specific purposes, namely to ensure the security of the lives of Ottoman subjects, the development of a regulated tax system (and the

[22] Schilcher., 48.
[23] Ma'oz, 21.
[24] Ussama Makdisi, 'Rethinking Ottoman Imperialism: modernity, Violence and the Cultural Logic of Ottoman Reform,' in Jens Hanssen, *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Würzburg : Ergon in Kommission, 2002), 31.

discontinuation of tax farming), and a system for the "levying of troops and establishing their terms of service."[25] Perhaps the most important aspect of the decree was the explicit instructions that Muslims and non-Muslims alike were equal before the law: "The Muslim and other peoples who are among the subjects of our imperial sultanate, shall be the object of our imperial favours without exception."[26] This aspect of the reforms, as Makdisi has shown "formally committed the empire to a course of modernization under effective western tutelage."[27]

The intricacies of the Tanzimat are far too complicated for full elaboration here, although the consequences of their imposition in Bilad al-Sham are of prime importance. For many, the Tanzimat reforms effectively ushered in an era of Ottoman 'imperialism.' In *Empire in the City*, Jens Hanssen writes that late Ottoman imperialism emerged "as a dialectic and discursive process between imperial perceptions of the Empire's own past and its provinces as backward on the one hand and of contemporary European states as models of progress and modernity to be aspired to on the other."[28]

What, then, serves to differentiate the system and structure of Ottoman imperialism from its French counterpart? Unlike the structure that emerged under the French Mandate, the Ottoman imperial structure consisted of an array of "colonial situations rather than constituting a closed, coherent and clearly structured system of power."[29] In other words, the Ottoman 'state' was never the sole beneficiary of the exploitation of the indigenous population of Bilad al-Sham. Ottoman imperialism, unlike its British and French counterparts in the early twentieth century, had no real 'colonies.'

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[25] Ma'oz, 22.
[26] Quoted in Ma'oz., 22.
[27] Makdisi, 'Rethinking Ottoman Imperialism,' 31.
[28] Hanssen, *Empire in the City*, 9.
[29] Ibid., 7.

What the Ottoman state actually accomplished via the Tanzimat in Bilad al-Sham was markedly different from what might be expected. According to Hanssen, the imperial state "attempted to assume monopoly over the interpretation of modernity" and it was the *discourse* of modernity, not the processes of modernization, "that set the Tanzimat apart from preceding modes of Ottoman provincial rule." Many of the previous forms of rule, including control based on tribal affiliation, came to be viewed as "remnants of the past that hindered 'enlightened' imperial reforms."[30]

Again there is the question of 'what does it all mean.' In the early nineteenth century, Syria experienced a decade-long occupation and the imposition of drastic reforms, which some have argued were a direct result of the policies introduced by Muhammad 'Ali. One accomplishment of the Egyptian occupation, which was capitalized on by the Ottoman government soon after it came to an end, was the way in which local and feudal leaders were effectively stripped of their power. Throughout Ibrahim Pasha's time in Bilad al-Sham, a strong centralized style of government was developed. This government had the backing of a substantial military force, which in turn depended on the government for its day-to-day provisions. It is perhaps far-fetched to compare this governmental structure to the rule of Hafiz al-Asad in the latter half of the twentieth century, but there are some similar characteristics. Further similarities can be seen in the ways the Ottoman state attempted to control the discourse of 'modernity.' Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, Istanbul attempted to exert its power over the Arab provinces through a variety of means.

The 1858 Land Code was one of the more notable reforms announced by the Ottoman government as part of the Tanzimat. In a broad sense, the code can be seen as

[30] Ibid., 9

somewhat of an attempt to centralize administration within the province of *Bilad al-Sham*, as "The communal or tribal forms of land tenure that prevailed in most of the region were slowly replaced by private ownership, and subsistence farming gave way to production for the market."[31] Essentially, absentee landlords, whose families had held the rights to their land for generations, replaced these tribal farmers under the new system. Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett have argued, echoing Moshe Ma'oz, that one lasting legacy of Ibrahim Pasha's rule in Syria was his success in controlling the influence of tax farmers, who had dominated the region since the sixteenth century.[32] The basic purpose of the code was to reassert the Ottoman government's complete ownership of the *tapu* (state owned) land, and it was used to raise revenues, "to take advantage of the evident demand for the formalisation of 'property rights', however defined."[33] As a result, the region of *Bilad al-Sham* became increasingly integrated in the economic organization of the Empire, as it produced a significant amount of grain that was sent throughout the Ottoman provinces.

From Abdul-Hamid II to the Young Turks

One of the more notorious moments of Syria under late-Ottoman rule took place in 1860 as thousands, mostly Christians, were massacred both in villages on Mount

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[31] Charles Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4; quoted in Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, 'The Application of the 1858 Land Code in Greater Syria: Some Preliminary Observations,' in Tarif Khalidi, ed., *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984), 409. Article 130 of the Land Code is important for its dealings with tax collectors, landlords and farmers. As there was not enough money to appoint tax collectors, these duties often were left to the landlords, who exercised a great deal of freedom in their collection of taxes. An online translation of the 1858 Land Code is available at http://www.archive.org/stream/ottomanlandcode00turkuoft/ottomanlandcode00turkuoft_djvu.txt, accessed May 6, 2011.

[32] Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, 410-411.

[33] Ibid., 414.

Lebanon and in Damascus.[34] Moshe Ma'oz puts forward the 'traditional' account that these massacres, and *the* subsequent destruction of *several* European consulates, were directly tied to "Muslim-Christian antagonism which developed from the Tanzimat reforms, notably the *Hatt-i Hümayun* (Imperial Rescript)" that further emphasized the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims before the law. The Muslims of Damascus, according to Ma'oz, were "more sensitive that other Muslims in the country to the change in the traditional orthodox character of the city,"[35] and this fact, coupled with the increasing tendency among Christian inhabitants of the city to make their faith more prominent, culminated in tragedy. There was also a significant current of suspicion among Damascene Muslims, as they viewed the recent declarations made by the Ottoman government, and the subsequent increase in "defiance and insolence" among Christians, as a manifestation of European meddling, specifically a European-Christian attempt to undermine the Islamic nature of the Ottoman Empire.[36]

The sectarian nature of the riots should not be taken lightly, nor should it be seen as the sole cause. Some historians, notably Abdul-Karim Rafeq, have proposed the idea that the events of 1860 (and 1850 in Aleppo) were not as sectarian as once thought, and thus have, in the words of Eugene Rogan, sought to "distance the exceptional events of 1860 from explanations grounded in primordial sectarian differences."[37] In an article on the 1860 riots, Rafeq pays particular attention to the inheritances of eight individuals,

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[34] Similar events had taken place in Aleppo in 1850, and occurred simultaneously in Lebanon in 1860, as Lebanese Druze massacred Lebanese Christians in 1860. See Bruce Masters, 'The 1850 Events in Aleppo: An aftershock of Syria's Incorporation into the World Capitalist System,' *IJMES* 22, no. 1 (Feb., 1990): 3-20; Abdul-Karim Rafeq, 'New Light on the 1860 Riots in Ottoman Damascus,' *Die Welt des Islams,* New Series, Bd. 28, Nr. ¼ (1988): 412-430; Eugene Rogan, 'Sectarianism and Social Conflict in Damascus: the 1860 Events Reconsidered,' *Arabica*, T. 51, Fasc. 4 (Oct., 2004): 493-511.
[35] Ma'oz, *Ottoman Reform*, 231.
[36] Ibid., 232-233.
[37] Rogan, 'Sectarianism and Social Conflict in Damascus', 497.

noting that creditors were often given precedence over heirs in the distribution of wealth of the deceased. With his characteristic attention to detail and careful use of course records, Rafeq paints a new historical picture, one that looks not only at the composition of wealth of those who participated in the riots, but also where and how they gained their wealth and what that says about the economic bases of power at the time. For Rafeq, the 1860 events were less about the 'emancipation' of Christians that resulted from the Tanzimat reforms, but more about economic rivalry between the different communities (Muslim, Christian, etc.) within the social elites. Surely, as Rafeq points out, there is the obvious possibility that the debtors incited the riots to see the "elimination" of their creditors.[38]

A lasting effect of the events of 1860 in Damascus was the almost immediate migration of large numbers of Christians from Damascus to 'safer' regions of the Empire. New schools were constructed, intended for both Muslims and Christians, with the first emerging in Aleppo. These attempts, however, had little impact on a population that appeared to grow more and more dissatisfied with their situation quite rapidly. The reforms announced and implemented by the Porte were seen not only as concessions to imperious European desires, but as affronts to Islam as well.[39] Europeans noticed this apparent dissatisfaction as well, and would soon transform it into part of their moral justification for taking control of the Arab provinces:

> During the long and unrestrained dominion of Egypt over Syria, the languages, sympathies, interests and prospects of the Turkish Empire were daily becoming more and more estranged from the minds of the people and it was no uncommon

[38] Rafeq, 'New Light on the 1860 Riots in Ottoman Damascus', 429.
[39] See Ma'oz, pp. 243-244. There is also the notion that these massacres had socio-economic roots and were not as 'sectarian' as has been thought; see Abdul-Karim Rafeq, 'New Light on the 1860 Riots in Ottoman Damascus,' Die Welt des Islams, 28 (1988): 412-430. Cf Bruce Masters, 'The 1850 Events in Aleppo: An Aftershock of Syria's Incorporation into the World Capitalist System,' *IJMES* 22 (1990): 3-20.

> thing to hear inhabitants express their opinion that the Sublime Porte would never again have the Government of the country.[40]

In his work on Syria, Albert Hourani characterized the rule of Abdul-Hamid II as "one of tyranny and one of repression" *although Kayali and Selim Deringil have somewhat modified our understanding of this period.* [41] Hourani also noted that despite this state of affairs, some Syrians prospered, since many of the Sultan's advisors happened to be Syrians themselves. However, despite Abdul-Hamid's attempts to cultivate political consciousness into an element that could be used as an ideological weapon against the West, namely pan-Islamism, most of the political ideology that emerged under his rule was directly related to desires to see an end to autocracy.[42] This movement was splintered, as some wished to see the revival of constitutional rule that came about with the promulgation of the 1876 Ottoman constitution, which also included a limitation, although not the elimination, of the power of the Sultan; this line of thought was espoused by the Young Turks.[43] The second, and perhaps more notable, sought changes in the status of the Arab provinces. As Hourani points out, they were rather united along the lines of 'knowing what they did not want.' At this time, Arab nationalism did not really entail complete independence from the Ottoman government, but rather a sense of autonomy *within* the Empire.[44]

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[40] Quoted in Ibid., 245.
[41] By no means was this period devoid of positive developments. Abdul Hamid II ordered the construction of the Hijaz railway, and espoused the projects of building several shorter inland and coastal railways; see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), 156-158. See also Selim Deringil, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London, I. B. Tauris, 1998); and Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, esp. 30-38.
[42] See Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, 38-39.
[43] Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, 39; for a nuanced account of the Young Turks, see Eric Jan Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010).
[44] Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon*, 39.

Throughout the Tanzimat period, the Ottoman army served the purpose of controlling potential local insurrections, and military organization meant more troops were stationed in Syria, which also led to a more efficient tax collection system.[45] However, by 1875 the military presence in the region no longer served as a significant deterrent, as several 'proto-nationalist' groups emerged, among the two types of opposition movements explained by Hourani. Secret societies also gained influence, as one, led by Faris Namir, espoused an interfaith platform composed of an emphasis of Arab identity based on a common literary and cultural heritage, which in turn led to an anti-Turkish government platform.[46] Hourani also mentions a few "ineffective societies," the *Ligue de la Patrie Arabe* established in Paris in 1904, noting the characteristic disorganization of the early nationalist movement.

Soon, however, more organized groups emerged, including the Party of Ottoman Decentralization that was founded in Cairo in 1912, which espoused the above-mentioned idea of greater autonomy within the Empire. *al-Fatat* and *al-'Ahd*, two secret societies, emerged in 1911 and 1914, respectively, and the First Arab Congress met in Paris, in an effort to determine more precisely the relations of the Arab provinces with the central state. [47] Two principal groups, the Turco-Syrian Committee and the *Parti Constitutionnel en Turquie*, led by Salim Faris, emerged as noticeable promoters of what Kayali terms a "Syrianist" current of nationalist thought. These groups emphasized the elimination of

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[45] See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997), 32-33.
[46] Ibid., 33.
[47] James Gelvin has shown that the membership *al-Fatat* came from the "middle strata and second tier of Damascus nobility." He further shows that, perhaps fearful of the "low quality" of some new members, the group formed the public Arab Independence Party (*hizb al-istiqlal al-'arabi*), which acted as "a public front for the organization." Faysal, however, ultimately banned the party in 1919; James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 57-60.

religious difference, the improvement of general conditions in the region, and the full integration of Syrian society. In essence, these groups "sought the integration of ethnic and religious groups within Greater Syria around a regional identity within the Ottomanist framework."[48] However, it is important, first, that these activities involved no more than a tiny minority of the population, and second, that only minority within that minority ever raised the specter of 'secession', for the reasons that have already been discussed.

It would be hard to argue that these 'secret' societies remained as such, or that European interest and interference in the region went unnoticed. Thus, it is no coincidence that Ottoman rule during the early twentieth century, specifically the wartime governorship of Jamal Pasha, has been described as a 'reign of terror' directed at regaining total control over the region. Jamal Pasha was appointed to Syria in 1915, and provisional law assured that he had final say in the affairs of Syria on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. Hasan Kayali argues that Jamal Pasha's rule in Syria was "draconian," and that coupled with the disasters, both natural and war-related, led to the alienation of the population from the government. Interestingly, before his negotiations with the British, Sharif Husayn had also corresponded with Istanbul, which clearly illustrates that he and the Ottoman government were "actors who sought out their options and best interests, and not merely as passive victims of Great Power intrigue."[49] However, the actions of Jamal Pasha evidently forced Husayn to pursue his British option. Jamal's 'reign of terror' began early in 1915 as Ottoman forces broke into the French consulates

[48] Kayali, 42.
[49] Ibid., 191.

in Damascus and Beirut, which led to the discovery of documents hinting at subversive activity and the eventual punishment of Arab political and cultural leaders.[50]

Two prominent leaders, both of whom apparently expressed desire for Arab *autonomy*, were hanged in May 1916, a spectacle preceded by the hanging of a Maronite priest in 'Alayh for treason. A second tactic employed by Jamal was deportation, and under his command up to 5,000 Syrian families were deported to Anatolia while scores of Armenians were simultaneously being deported from eastern Anatolia to the Syrian Desert.[51] Thus, while there was no historical basis for claims that the Arabs had suffered 'for centuries' at the hands of the oppressive Ottomans, it was certainly apparent by the end of World War I (encouraged, obviously, by the sudden collapse of the Ottoman state) that Syrians, perhaps inspired by talk of independence and 'self-determination', felt it would be best if they determined their own fate. Throughout the nineteenth century, they had protested against conscription by the Ottomans, and suffered brutal treatment at the hands of their Egyptian occupiers and the heavy hand of Jamal Pasha. Any expectations of independence, however, were soon quashed as the reign of Jamal Pasha was replaced with the heavy-handed policies of the French Mandate after a brief interlude of quasi-independence under the rule of Faysal ibn Husayn.

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[50] Ibid., 192-193.

[51] Ibid., 193. Kayali offers a brief comparison of the deportations of Syrians and Armenians, noting that the deportation of Syrians "took place in relatively more humane circumstances." Furthermore, he emphasizes the psychological impact levied by the deportations, as many Syrians, aware of what was happening to the Armenians, were fearful they were to share a similar experience, see 193-195.

CHAPTER 3

'LA FRANCE EN SYRIE': *MISSION CIVILISATRICE* OR 'ILLIBERAL' IMPERIALISM? [1]

What France thought it was doing in Syria from 1920-1946 and what it was perceived as doing rarely seemed to coincide. Writing in 1922, Henri Gouraud provided what can only be described as an interesting take on the necessity of the French presence in Syria:

> Il me semble que je pourrais comparer la Syrie à une petite fille qu'aurait eue la France après la guerre, alors qu'elle avait déjà de nombreux enfants, si bien qu'elle ne l'a peut-être pas vue venir avec une joie particulière, mais aujourd'hui, voyant que l'enfant est jolie, bien portante, intelligente, pleine d'avenir, elle la prend résolument par la main pour la conduire vers ses detainees…Sans doute, est-ce dans sentiment de mere de famille qu'à la demande ferme du Président du Conseil, et grace à l'appui du minister des Finances, du grand patriote qu'est M. Doumer, le Parlement vient de me donner les credits necessaries pour que je puisse poursuivre "la mission sacrée de civilization" que proclame l'article 22 du pacte de la Société des Nations et dont la France a pris le belle et glorieuse charge.[2]

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[1] The phrase 'Illiberal Imperialism' is drawn from two articles in the edited volume *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean Late Nineteenth Century until the 1960s* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), one by Michael Provence in which he elaborates on the idea of 'Liberal' imperialism and colonialism and the other by Peter Sluglett entitled 'The Mandate System: High Ideals; Illiberal Practices.'

[2] "It seems to me that I could compare Syria to a little girl that France had after the war, when she already had many children, so many that perhaps she didn't see her (Syria) coming with any particular joy but, today, seeing that the child is pretty, healthy, intelligent, full of promise, she (France) takes her firmly by the hand to lead her towards her destiny…Undoubtedly, it is with the feelings of a mother that, at the firm request of the President of the Council, and thanks to the support of the Minister of Finance, to the great patriot Mr. Doumer, Parliament has just given me the necessary funds so that I may pursue "the sacred mission of civilization", proclaimed in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations, of which France has taken beautiful and glorious charge." General Gouraud, 'La France en Syrie,' in *Revue de France* (1 April, 1922): 21.

Obviously, Syrians were not likely to compare their state, if one could call it that, to a 'little girl,' just one among France's many children. In reality, France had a profound interest in other parts of the Middle East (and North Africa) as [3] well as in Syria, and pursued very different policies in its various possessions. Settler colonialism had long characterized the French occupation of Algeria that began in 1830, which would continue for 130 years despite fairly strong local resistance. France occupied Tunisia in 1881 and later established a protectorate over Morocco in 1912. While the reasons and justifications for each of these colonial undertakings differ to some extent, it goes without saying that France had a decided interest in maintaining and facilitating its presence in the region**.**

In any analysis of the French colonial enterprise from the eighteenth- to twentieth-centuries, one encounters several varying explanations, ranging from the benevolent civilizing mission expressed by General Gouraud, to an insistence that France received the Mandate over Syria and Lebanon due to her "long educational tradition,"[4] to a more specific economic interest as explained by Jules Ferry, prime minister between 1880 and 1881 and again between 1883 and 1885, who was one of the leading advocates of French colonial expansion:

> Colonial policy is the offspring of industrialisation [sic]…in this industrial age of man, social peace depends on outlets…we must cause fresh categories of consumers to appear in other parts of the world, for, if we fail to do so, modern

[3] Here the term 'Middle East' refers to what might be better described as the Middle East and North Africa, but for simplicity 'Middle East' will be used.

[4] Jacques Stern, former French Minister of Colonies, wrote that "The principal reason for offering France mandatory guardianship of these two countries [Syria and Lebanon] was her long educational tradition (dating from 1828) of which she was justly proud." He notes that before 1914 France had built 1,200 schools, and also notes the desires expressed by Syria and Lebanon to be set free from the Ottoman Empire, a claim that is perhaps far less valid than its educational counterpart; Jacques Stern, *The French Colonies: Past and Future,* trans. Norbert Guterman (Didier: New York, 1944), 221. Many contemporaries also argued that for France, controlling Syria, by whatever means was in essence an act of 'reclaiming the patrimony that it had once had at the time of the Crusades.'

> society will go bankrupt and the dawn of the twentieth century will witness social turmoil of so cataclysmic a kind that its consequences are not to be foreseen.[5]

Later, he rather succinctly asserted what might be considered the best justification for colonialism: "one cannot be a great power if one stays in one's own backyard."[6]

Europe in the Middle East at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

European interest in the Middle East dates back much farther than the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fact that France had been a major participant in the Crusades was not lost on prominent Arab thinkers of the twentieth century, and a noticeable contrast can be seen between the beliefs of French colonialists as outlined above and those of various Arab 'nationalists', such as Sati al-Husri. Husri insists that

> The history of French aspirations in Syria is a long one that dates back to the Crusades. The French are accustomed to look upon these wars as an achievement of their 'great ancestors' and to regard the Latin Kingdoms which emerged here and there on Syrian soil during those wars as a part of their 'glorious history.' Naturally, therefore, they have developed an inclination to complete the work of those wars and to restore the ancient kingdoms.[7]

He further insists that this 'inclination' to restore the ancient kingdoms was a, if not the, principal motive behind France's desire to "set themselves up as protectors of the Christians in the East in anticipation of exploiting them some day as a pretext for the seizure of Syria."[8] It is clear that the French were not widely welcome in the 1920s, as is demonstrated first by the findings of the King Crane Commission and then by the Syrian Revolt, but Husri was evidently making use of the stigma of the Crusades in an attempt to

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[5] Quoted in Henry Brunschwig, *French Colonialism 1871-1914: Myths and Realities* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 84-85. Throughout his time, Ferry saw Tunisia (1881), Madagascar (1885) and most of Indochina (1885) added to the French Empire.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Sati al-Husri, *The Day of Maysalun: A Page from the Modern History of the Arabs*, trans. Sidney Glazer (Washington, D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 1966), 17.
[8] Ibid.

mobilize nationalist thought among Syrians. Interestingly, Gouraud also made reference to France's crusader tradition:

> Les traditions françaises sont tres vieilles au Liban et en Syrie. Sans remonter jusqu'aux Croisades, qui ont laissé sur le sol les magnifiques châteaux dont il est si émouvant de contempler la splendeur et la force, nos missionaires**,** nos marins, nos ingénieurs ont, depuis longtemps, apporté leur dévoûment et leur intelligence sur ces côtes.[9]

He further elaborated that a significant achievement of Lebanon was the prevalence of the French language.[10]

A significant factor contributing to European, especially French, interest in Syria was the desire to build and control the region's railroads and shipping lines, and France had been instrumental in the construction of the port of Beirut and the railroad southwards from Anatolia to Hama and Damascus. While French penetration into Syria prior to the twentieth century had largely undertaken by missionaries,[11] France had made significant investments in the economic structure of Syria by the beginning of the 1900s. William Shorrock counters the claim that French control of Syria was merely a product of post-war negotiations that were in turn the end result of various agreements such as the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence,[12] arguing that France had made significant investments in the economic structure of Syria and that the French claim to Syria and Lebanon "was recognized internationally even before the war erupted. … [T]he nineteenth century had witnessed the tremendous penetration of French

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[9] "French traditions are very old in Lebanon and Syria. Without going back to the Crusades, which left magnificent castles in place whose splendor and power are still moving to contemplate, our missionaries, our sailors, and our engineers have long applied their devotion and intelligence on these shores." Gouraud, *France en Syrie*, 6.

[10] See Ibid.

[11] For an excellent account of the history of Protestant missionaries in the Middle East, and the remarkable story of one of their Arab converts, see Usama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[12] See below.

religious influence into Syria and Lebanon through the establishment of clerical schools, hospitals, asylums and orphanages."[13] Then there was the ever-present claim that France was there to help 'liberate' the Syrians and Lebanese from the oppressive Ottomans, even if it was limited to providing them giving them autonomy within the Empire. By the late 1930s, however, this notion had been almost completely disproved. In a recent article, Michael Provence quotes a (somewhat a-historical) Friday sermon from Nablus intended to rouse the Syrian population given on 7 February 1936:

> Syria, Transjordan, and Palestine were governed justly as one country under the Ottoman State. The State of Syria was divided into three parts after the occupation. The mandate in all these countries [intends to weaken] the spirit of nationalism, kill the common Arab feeling, and plunder their wealth….We ask, "Did any year pass after the occupation without bloody revolutions where our blood was shed and our rights were swallowed?[14]

Similar sentiments are also prevalent among modern historians of the region. Jens Hanssen, speaking of the claim that Turkish disdain for the Arabs was a major factor in the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, asserts that there is no "historical culture and political difference along (protonational) Turkish-Arab racial lines.[15] As became apparent from the findings of the King-Crane Commission, some segments of the Syrian population did prefer the French over the Ottomans, but these minority groups, most notably the Maronites and other Uniate Christians, likely professed these sentiments in efforts to gain certain concessions after the war, rather than out of a genuine distaste for the Ottoman Empire. France also had a vested interest in the well-being of the Maronite

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[13] William I. Shorrock, 'The Origin of the French Mandate in Lebanon: The Railroad Question. 1901-1914,' in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (hereafter *IJMES)* 1, no. 2 (Apr. 1970): 133.
[14] Quoted in Michael Provence, 'Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East,' in *IJMES* 43 (2011): 205.
[15] Hanssen, *Empire in the City*, 8.

population of the region, and was especially friendly to the coastal regions due to their place within the French economy.

William Shorrock also argues persuasively that while of all European powers France had the most substantial historical 'claim' to the Levant, Great Britain, Italy, Germany and Italy were all developing new interests in the region at the beginning of the twentieth century. As these countries' interests centered on economic issues, France realized that "religious and political influence simply were not enough to establish French predominance."[16] Of course, France had substantial economic interests: in 1914, French investors controlled 62.9 percent of the Ottoman Public Debt, and a combination of British and French capital owned the entire Imperial Ottoman Bank.[17]

The French position in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, though perhaps seemingly stable, faced numerous problems. French politicians and diplomats opposed action that might ruffle Russian feathers, including any major investment and cooperation with Germany on the Baghdad railway project. At the time, while anti-clerical sentiment was a growing phenomenon in France, some French diplomats were probably justifiably wary of Italy and its potential interests in replacing it as the "protector of Catholic interests in the Middle East."[18] Any reservations France had about Germany attempting to extend its sphere of influence disappeared soon after the Franco-German agreement of 15 February 1914, which ultimately defined Syria as within the French sphere of influence. Negotiations and an agreement with Turkey followed in April, essentially acknowledging France's continued economic and religious presence in

[16] Shorrock, 134.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 139.

the Levant.[19] It was this historic and economic investment, perhaps more than any desire to reestablish the ancient Latin Kingdoms and relive the Crusades, which pushed France to request, if not demand, that it be given 'control' over Syria and Lebanon after World War I.

The Arab Revolt and Broken Promises

One of the most recognizable Arab contributions to World War I is the Arab Revolt, which has since been immortalized in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*. With significant British assistance, including the support of Col. T.E. Lawrence, Faysal ibn Husayn, son of the Sharif of Mecca, distracted the attention of the Ottomans throughout 1916-1918, took Aqaba in 1917, and eventually made his way to Damascus, where it became apparent that he would play some sort of role in the future government. This role, however, short lived though it may have been, is a vital component of modern Syrian history and of the foundation myth of the Syrian state. Though the British may have grossly overestimated his likely popularity among Syrians, Faysal seemed at least initially a better alternative to foreign rule. Previous 'agreements,' most notably the Husayn-McMahon correspondence between the British and his father the Sharif of Mecca, which had vaguely promised his father some sort of independent Arab state,[20] had instilled in Faysal and some of the more politically conscious Arabs of Syria, Lebanon

[19] For an analysis of the Franco-German agreement, see John Keiger, 'Jules Cambon and Franco-German Détente, 1907-1914, in *The Historical Journal,* Vol. 26, No. 3 (Sep., 1983): 641-659. Interestingly, France and Germany conducted negotiations over Morocco in 1909, leading to a general distrust among France's other European allies. According to E. W. Edwards "[t]he agreement with Germany was an error on the part of France. It smacked of disloyalty to her friends for the sake of material advantage." E. W. Edwards, 'The Franco-German Agreement on Morocco, 1909,' in *The English Historical Review,* Vol. 78, No. 308 (Jul., 1963): 513. One of the Recurring problems for France's investment in Syrian railways was the parallel lines running between Damascus and southern Syria, with France owning and operating a Damascus-Muzeirib line, which competed with the Hijaz Railway; see Shorrock, ''The Origin of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon,' 141-143.

[20] As well as the far less ambiguous Anglo-French Declaration of November 1918 (see below).

and Mesopotamia the idea that after the war, thanks to their efforts against the Ottoman Empire, *they* would ultimately be in charge of their own destiny. However, as Gouraud's words illustrate, France had entirely different ideas. The Arab Kingdom of Syria, which is considered to be the first 'modern' Arab state, lasted only a few short months after a declaration of independence and the crowning of Faysal ibn Husayn as king by the Syrian Congress. Shortly thereafter, France asserted its control over Syria, and General Gouraud took Damascus after the infamous Battle of Maysalun on 23 July 1920.

Though it was to be ultimately disregarded, the Sykes-Picot agreement is an important development in the history of modern Syria. While French interests in Syria had been somewhat protected through various prior international agreements, France still found it necessary to seek recognition of its vested interest in the Levant. The language of the agreement is telling when one seeks to determine the trajectory of French aims in Syria. Further sections of the correspondence detail the ways in which Britain and France sought to be the ultimate map-makers in the region in the event that the Ottomans were defeated, and, at least in regions of their 'direct control,' they would ask the opinions of the local populations only as they saw fit.

However, to satisfy the demands of the international community after 1918, the French had at least to pretend to ascertain the wishes of the people, and often the reports to the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations hint at a legitimate interest in the state of affairs in the country.[21] With the Mandate came a questionnaire, intended to 'guide' the Mandatory power through its 'service,' with questions such as

[21] See République Française, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, 'Rapport sur la Situation de la Syrie et du Liban [Report on the Situation in Syria and the Lebanon (Paris, various dates).

"What measures have been taken to encourage local autonomy?"[22] In a very similar manner, the Syrian military regimes of the late 1940s-1970 would pay equally little attention to the desires and demands of the local populations, instead focusing on how to perpetuate their influence and control. One significant difference, however, is that the governments in Syria after 1946 were actually Syrian.

Judging by the numerous agreements and secret correspondence, the Allied powers knew, or at least very much hoped, that the Ottoman Empire was going to be torn apart at the end of the war. Thus, the victorious Allies set about determining and defining an international policy of dealing with, or divvying up, the former lands of the Ottoman Empire south and south east of Anatolia in 1918, and by the time of the treaty of Lausanne in 1923 they had completed their objective. The postwar settlements contained numerous provisions, and dealt with a number of issues, but the prime concern of this thesis is the development and maintenance of the French Mandate over Syria, and its historical consequences. Early in November 1918, Britain and France issued the following joint statement of their aims in the postwar Middle East:

> The aim of France and Great Britain in carrying on in the Near East the war let loose by Germany's ambitions is the *complete and final liberation of the peoples so long oppressed by the Turks* [my italics] and the establishment of Governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and the free choice of the native populations [in Syria and Mesopotamia]….Far from seeking to enforce upon the populations of these countries any particular institution, France and Great Britain have no other concern than to insure by their support and their active assistance the normal working of the Governments and institutions which the populations shall have freely adopted, so as to secure just impartiality for all, and also to facilitate economic development of the country in arousing and encouraging local initiatives by the diffusion of instruction, and to put an end to discords which have too long been taken advantage of by Turkish rule. Such is the role that the two allied Governments claim for themselves in the liberated territories.[23]

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[22] 'Questionnaire,' *Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon.*
[23] See 'France and Britain Tell Aims in East,' *The New York Times* (Nov. 8, 1918), added emphasis.

This statement, which appeared in the *New York Times* in November 1918, is one of the more notorious pronouncements detailing the Allies' 'benevolent' plans for the Middle East after the war. The Sykes-Picot Agreement painted a far different picture; it was an attempt to control as much of the former Ottoman Empire as possible without appearing to do so. As was common, the Turks were cast as unjust oppressors, while the Allies were merely there to guide the fledgling nations along until they could stand on their own feet.[24] Of particular interest is the sentence beginning "Far from seeking," in that it seems to promise, in every sense of the word, that the ultimate determination and decision-making regarding the future of Syria and Mesopotamia would be left to those who lived there, not a new international organization based in Geneva, or a parliament in Paris.

While the principal views and desires of France and the rest of the Allies have been outlined above, it now seems pertinent to examine what political arrangements the inhabitants of the regions soon to be under Mandate control actually wanted. In the summer of 1919, after failing to get for support for an international commission for the same purpose**,** the United States government commissioned two men, Henry Churchill King and Charles R. Crane, to conduct a survey of the inhabitants of the region to determine if they were indeed 'ready' for self-determination and to ascertain their thoughts on mandatory rule. The commission was undoubtedly an American endeavor, and though it was carried out in accordance with the principles of the League of Nations, there was a concerted effort to cast it as entirely ambivalent with regard to colonial aspirations:

[24] It is interesting to note that by 1918, in most correspondence, the territories of Syria and Mesopotamia were already being referred to as 'nations,' 'countries,' and 'states.'

> The American people—having no political ambitions in Europe or the Near East; preferring, if that were possible, to keep clear of all European, Asian, or African entanglements but nevertheless sincerely desiring that the most permanent peace and the largest results for humanity shall come out of this war—recognize that they cannot altogether avoid responsibility for just settlements among the nations following the war, and under the League of Nations. In that spirit they approach the problems of the Near East.[25]

The findings of the commission were disregarded by the Western powers, but the desires of the inhabitants of the region speak volumes to the assertion that France sought to ensure its presence in Syria by whatever means necessary. According to King-Crane, over 80 percent of those petitioned desired a united Syria; fifty-seven percent opposed an independent Greater Lebanon; and ten percent supported the idea of Lebanese independence. Just over 59 percent of those asked favored an independent Arab Kingdom, and roughly the same number supported Faysal as king, obviously as the preferred alternative to foreign control. Perhaps surprisingly, a French Mandate was favored over British control (fourteen to four percent) but less than 1 percent favored a French Mandate if mandatory rule was 'obligatory.' While there was more support for British 'assistance' than French, the percentage of those who answered in favor of this still came to less than a single percentage point. It may seem somewhat controversial, but nonetheless American 'assistance' was favored by a majority of those petitioned, as some 57 percent of those asked responded with some degree of approval.[26] Despite several controversial aspects of the report, including the apparent usage of propaganda and misquoting in questions and answers, the commission asserted that

> The petitions are certainly representative. As the classified list of delegations received by the Commission clearly indicates, the petitions came from a wide

[25] See 'The King-Crane Commission Report, August 28, 1919,' available online via Brigham Young University's World War I Document Archive, http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_King-Crane_Report, accessed 15 March, 2011.
[26] See Ibid.

> range of political, economic, social, and religious classes and organizations. It was generally known throughout Syria that the American Commission would receive in confidence any documents that any individual or group should care to present. In the few cities in which the military authorities sought to exert control, directly or indirectly, over the delegations, without exception the opposition parties found opportunities to present their ideas to the Commission, if not always orally, at least in writing.[27]

As mentioned, the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the King-Crane Commission report were ultimately disregarded, as the postwar political balance of power was drastically different from what it been during the conflict. In the first place, Britain rather than France had the most substantial international presence in Syria in October 1918, due in part to the fact that the war was in fact fought on French soil. Furthermore, the aspirations of many Syrians for independence, especially of those who had cooperated with the British and Faysal in the Arab Revolt, were seen as part of a British plot intended to undermine French interests. Nonetheless, in November/ December 1918, Lloyd George and Georges Clemenceau agreed to a new postwar alignment under which France ceded its 'Sykes-Picot rights' over Mosul to Britain. Further negotiations ensued, and Lloyd George attempted to convince Clemenceau and the French to welcome the United States and Faysal to the negotiating table, but this was refused. By 1919 Lloyd George agreed to cede control of Cilicia and Syria to France. After the departure of British troops from Syria, Faysal faced an entirely new problem: he now had to deal directly and exclusively with the French, who proved much less in tune with the various nationalist sentiments and movements that had been developing in Syria during and after the First World War.[28] After unsuccessfully appealing to London and Paris for assistance, Faysal was resigned to his fate, and by 1920 the future of France in Syria was

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[27] Ibid.
[28] See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 34-39.

determined. The French authorities "recognized Syria's right to self-government and guaranteed its independence and territorial integrity" as long as Faysal agreed to accept aid only from France.[29] In Faysal's own words, "he had been handed over tied by feet and hands to the French."[30] All that remained was for the various agreements and arrangements to be endorsed by the international community, through the newly formed League of Nations.

The Mandate System

The French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon was formally published on 24 July 1922 by the League of Nations, and would fashion the political landscape of Syria for the next twenty-six years. Though it is often quoted, the language of the Mandate, like that of the various correspondences of the era, hints at a period of domination and traces of orientalist thought can be ascertained through a careful reading. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations laid out the principle of the Mandate System:

> To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant….The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.[31]

There is one specific sentence found in a subsequent section of Article 22 that seems especially relevant to this analysis:

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[29] Ibid., 37.
[30] Quoted in Andrew and Kanya-Forstner, 204.
[31] See the Covenant of the League of Nations.

> Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone. *The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.*[32]

So, what happened to the findings of the King-Crane Commission? Granted it was by no means a definitive survey of public opinion throughout the region, there still seems to have been enough information to prompt the Allies to realize that a mandate for Syria, let alone a French Mandate, was the least desired form of postwar government.

Nonetheless, the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon was given to the French, and it contained several provisions to ensure French control over the region. Article I specified that France was to "frame, within a period of three years from the coming into force of this mandate, an organic law for Syria and the Lebanon."[33] Again, cooperation with the local populations was stipulated, but there was little in terms of enforcement mechanisms to make sure that this took place: "This organic law shall be framed with the native authorities and shall take into account the rights, interests, and wishes of all the population inhabiting the said territory." Furthermore, "The Mandatory shall, as far as circumstances permit, encourage local autonomy."[34] The vague language of the Mandate, which appears unexceptionable alongside the various declarations and agreements of the postwar period, left virtually all decisions to the French Mandatory authorities. The mandate goes on to ensure that France would remain in charge of Syria's foreign relations and its judicial system. An interesting continuation of Ottoman policy is found in Article 8 of the Mandate. Though it would be erroneous to say that freedom of religion

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[32] Ibid.
[33] League of Nations, "Mandate for Syria and the Lebanon."
[34] Ibid.

was a recent innovation, the provision against religious and racial discrimination is still of interest:

> The Mandatory shall ensure to all complete freedom of conscience and the free exercise of all forms of worship which are consonant with public order and morality. No discrimination of any kind shall be made between the inhabitants of Syria and the Lebanon on the ground of differences in race, religion, or language.[35]

The final stamp of French influence came with the imposition of French, along with Arabic, as one of the official languages of the Mandate.

Resistance to Domination: The Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927

In 1922, General Gouraud had the following to say about the state of affairs in Syria and Lebanon:

> la Syrie et le Liban ont été tres calmes pendant l'année écoulée , et ils seraient meme restes completement, n'étaient les excitations venues du dehors. Celles-ci se sont surtout manifestées dans le Nord, où une propagande très active a été menée et où toute une organisation destinée à troubler le pays a été constatée.[36]

The problems of the north were the armed tribal bands, which were wreaking havoc on the borderlands with Turkey, slowly increasing in both number and frequency.[37] According to James Gelvin, "the most effective of the committee-affiliated guerilla leaders was Ibrahim Hananu."[38] Hananu was a former member of the Syrian Congress,

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[35] Ibid.

[36] "Syria and Lebanon have been very quiet during the past year, and would have stayed so completely, but for the excitations from outside. These were concentrated in the north, where very active propaganda [campaign] was carried out and an organization intended to disturb the country was found." General Gouraud, 'France en Syrie,' 21.

[37] See Jean-David Mizrahi, 'Un "nationalisme de la frontière." Bandes armées et sociabilités politiques sur la frontière turco-syrienne au début des années 1920,' in *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*. No. 78 (Apr.-Jun., 2003), 19-34. Nadine Méouchy provides a more nuanced view, in which she elaborates on the problems engendered by the new borders and the new 'identities' brought about by such territorial divisions in 'Rural Resistance and the Introduction of Modern Forms of Consciousness in the Syrian Countryside, 1918-1926,' in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann, eds., *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Beirut: Orient Institute, 2004), 275-289.

[38] James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1998), 133.

but he had resigned that post to contribute to the resistance against the French, and helped organize logistical support, coordinated guerilla units, convinced local 'ulama to declare *jihad* against the French, and "insured the rebellion would remain self-sustaining."[39] Furthermore, throughout the war and its immediate aftermath, French authorities grew increasingly suspicious of the aims of other Allied powers, especially Britain and its heavy wartime investment in Syria and close ties to Amir Faysal.

The final episode in the history of mandatory Syria that will be dealt with in this thesis is the revolt against French rule initiated by local leaders in Jabal Hawran.[40] The revolt was significant, but it did not throw off the French, or hasten the process of French withdrawal. Rather, it ensured that the remaining years of the Mandate would be even more authoritarian in nature than had been imagined, as well as ushering in an era of what Philip Khoury has termed 'honorable cooperation.'[41]

Although full-scale rebellion did not erupt until 1925, organized and physical resistance to the French presence emerged soon after France took control of the region. When the short-lived government of Faysal was overthrown by the French, thousands of Syrians marched to the pass of Khan Maysalun in an attempt to keep French forces from occupying Damascus. Many of these Syrians had vehemently opposed attempts by Faysal's government to conscript them into the army, based largely on their memories of World War I, a fact that supports the idea that though the revolt did emerge with some nationalist sentiment, it was more about the desire to be free of foreign control. Even though the numerically and technologically superior French forces easily defeated the

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[39] Ibid., 133-134.
[40] The revolt is the subject of the excellent work of Michael Provence, see *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007)
[41] See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, specifically 327-397.

rag-tag group of army veterans, merchants, religious leaders, and quarter bosses, the ready mobilization of these Syrians should have served as an indication of what was to come. [42]

The French defeated the Syrians, but what soon became apparent was that the popular mobilization exemplified by this resistance to the French taking of Damascus was emerging as a more organized and more concrete movement. While labeling such movements as strictly 'nationalist' poses problems, as James Gelvin has argued,[43] by this time they were far more organized, and had far more precise objectives, than their pre-war predecessors. They developed the ability to recruit members who shared the same ideological foundation, whereas groups like *al-Fatat* often lamented the disorganization and low quality of their new recruits.[44] These 'new' organizations of the 1920s, despite their divergent views on what the future makeup of Syria should be, all agreed that the most desirable future was one without the French. Further complicating the matter was the fact that this 'nationalist' thought was no longer solely the concern of national elites. Before the mid 1920s it was educated Syrians who were able to travel abroad and form their secret and public societies who promulgated the ideologies one would consider 'nationalist;' by the beginning of the Great Syrian Revolt, it was rebels from the countryside, "ordinary Syrians," who were sacrificing the most in the effort to rid Syria of French rule.[45]

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[42] Provence, 49.
[43] *Divided Loyalties.*
[44] Ibid., 57-60.
[45] See Michael Provence, 'Identifying Rebels: Insurgents in the Countryside of Damascus, 1925-1926,' in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann, eds., *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Beirut: Orient Institute, 2004), 291-306.

The fighting started when Druze men opened fire on a French airplane near Jabal Druze, on 18 July 1925. Some two days leader, the Druze leader Sultan al-'Atrash and a group of armed men on horseback seized the town of Salkhad, and the following day a band led by Sultan Pasha ambushed a column of 166 Algerian and Syrian troops who had been sent to rescue the stranded pilots. In perhaps the most significant early action, later that same night al-'Atrash's forces seized Suwayda', which played a prominent role as capital of Jabal Druze and a "central point of French administration."[46] The popularity of al-'Atrash's movement increased almost immediately, and its numbers swelled into a small army, equal to roughly one-fifth of the regional population.[47] At the end of the month, another Druze contingent, again led by Sultan al-'Atrash, ambushed a relief column of 3,000 French troops, which led to the suicide of a French commander whose troops had fled and the capturing of over 2,000 rifles by the Druze rebels.[48]

As has been said, the origins of this conflict can be traced almost directly to French colonial policy. In an attempt to secure the loyalty of the region, French authorities sought to gain the support of certain Druze leaders, often at the expense of relationships with others. Salim al-'Atrash was elevated to an official position in the Druze area, which led to nothing more than hostility from his 'equals.' The French authorities made sure that they were able to retain control over the Druze governors, and the agreements between the two parties stipulated that French administration could remove any governor it deemed unacceptable for any reason.[49] The effect of this policy cannot be understated. In a region where tradition was paramount, it was rather difficult

[46] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 151.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 152-153.
[49] Ibid., 153.

for the various Druze leaders to accept this change, seeing that their traditional routes to power and prestige were literally cut off by new French policy. In the words of Philip Khoury, "the cause of Druze, as of Syrian discontent lay in France's persistence in applying methods learned in North Africa to the very different Syrian situation."[50]

By August 1925, the revolt had started to spread, and revolutionary decrees and tracts appeared throughout the inner cities of Syria, particularly Damascus. On 3 August 1925, a notice appeared in the Damascus bazaar that read

> O Arabs, descendants of glorious ancestors, we appeal to you to awake in these critical times of great tragedy under the government of France. There is nothing left to us but to mount a vigorous attack and expel this government from our country….O people, this is an auspicious moment, we must not let it pass….The time has come to realize what you have promised to yourselves….Unleash your arms before the enemy who has invaded our homes, set fire to out temples of God, and tread on our sacred books.[51]

By the time the revolt reached Damascus, as this notice shows, it had acquired mild Islamic undertones, though it was largely an expression of distaste for colonial rule. Similar tracts appeared in other cities, such as Homs and Hama, and these posters also called for armed resistance to the French.[52] A poster found by the French authorities in Homs addressed to "all Patriots" stated:

> The time has come to rise from our slumber and cease our silence. The hour of vengeance, of sacrifice, and of liberty has arrived. We shall cast off the chains of silence and gain our liberty by spilling our blood to save our homeland from the clutches of the tyrants and give voice to independence and liberty….Long live Syria, independence, and liberty.[53]

Almost immediately after the discovery of this poster, the rather extensive network of French intelligence sprang into action and numerous young men suspected of knowing

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[50] Ibid., 152.
[51] Quoted in Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 65.
[52] See Provence, 'Liberal Colonialism,' in *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean.*
[53] Quoted in Ibid., 62.

more than they should about the posters were brought in for questioning, detained over night, and likely subjected to torture.[54] This quick resort to torture and intense questioning and interrogation is part of what Michael Provence has termed "the subversion of the supposed legal structures of the Mandate."[55] According to Mandate law, and as laid out in the Mandate itself, when crimes were suspected, responsibility for an investigation lay solely with the local government. By this time, however, martial law was in place, which virtually did away with any semblance of local authority, and gave ultimate discretion to the French high commissioner.

Even though the revolt began in earnest in the fall of 1925, the French counteroffensive did not take place until well into 1926. By that time, the Syrian leaders had made their demands known through a series of appeals to Mandate authorities. First, they called for a general amnesty; second, they demanded the unification of Syria, which would include the state of the 'Alawites, the ("return" of the) provinces added to Lebanon to form 'Grand Liban,' including the city of Beirut, and the establishment of Damascus as a capital; third, they demanded that ultimate authority be given to the local governments and the relegation of French authorities to a purely advisory role; fourth, they wanted to elect a Constituent Assembly to draft a new constitution for this new Syrian state; and finally, they asked for a definitive end date for the Mandate.[56] These demands were nothing new, and if read from a somewhat neutral perspective they appear well in line with the original provisions of the Mandate. It should have been obvious that Syrians were indeed ready for self-government, if for no other reason than their obvious distaste

[54] See Ibid., 63-64. Provence acknowledges that there is no official record of torture, but asserts that it was common practice under the mandate.
[55] Ibid., 64.
[56] See Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 128.

for their French overlords. These demands, however, were dismissed as unacceptable, and the French simply waited until they had enough reinforcements to quash the revolt with military strength.

Conclusion

What does this episode say about the nature of French colonialism in Syria? Though French occupation may have originally been presented as a benevolent civilizing mission, it was evident that by the end of 1927 this had ceased to represent any kind of reality on the ground. Some segments of the population did favor the French presence, predominantly the Maronites and other Uniate Christians, but the general opinion was that the French had no place in Syria. According to Michael Provence, "French Mandate legal and constitutional structures were not designed to protect the rights of mandatory citizens…so-called liberal imperialism was designed to earn praise from the international community, affirm French national prestige, and dull leftist criticism back in France." Furthermore, "[t]he cosmetic façade of liberal and constitutional rule fell away" as the martial laws and military rule that France resorted to after the uprising became commonplace.[57] In ways that would prove characteristic of Syria in the latter half of the twentieth century, suspicion, spying, suppression, arbitrary detention, and secrecy characterized French mandatory rule after the defeat of the Great Revolt. After all, it had already proven incredibly difficult to douse the flames of independence that were ignited by the various promises and proclamations made during and after the war. As Peter Sluglett has shown, while the French Mandate may have originated on the basis of 'high

[57] Provence, 'Liberal Colonialism,' 72.

ideals,' by the 1930s it was characterized by 'illiberal practices.'[58] Perhaps there is no better way to summarize this fact than by quoting from Philip Khoury's monumental study: "A small but tenacious group of Frenchmen…capitalized on the 'defensive patriotism' wrought by World War I to commit France to the military occupation of Syria in 1920. But, seizing Syria by force was one thing; governing the country was quite another."[59]

[58] See Peter Sluglett, 'The Mandate System: High Ideals; Illiberal Practices,' in *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean.*
[59] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 44.

CHAPTER 4

AUTHORITARIANISM AS WE KNOW IT: SYRIA FROM INDEPENDENCE TO THE FIRST LION OF DAMASCUS

Military Authoritarianism and the Coups of 1949-1963

Though it may seem counterintuitive when viewed in light of Hourani's quote regarding the perils of relegating history to specific periods, it is nonetheless useful to break down the history of post-Mandate Syria into three distinct timeframes; the period lasting from 1949-1963, in which Syria fell victim to nearly a dozen coups d'état; the period from 1963-1970, which saw the development of Ba'thist rule in the country, and finally the period of 1970 to the present, which constitutes (at least for now) the rule of the al-Asad family, beginning with Hafiz in 1970 and continuing with the succession of his son Bashar after his father's death in 2000. Interestingly, in her contribution to an edited volume on the less-familiar aspect of Syrian politics, Salwa Ismail begins by stating that "Since the 1960s, Syrian politics have been dominated by authoritarian forms of political rule that have concentrated governmental power in the hands of a few."[1] This statement is by no means incorrect, but as we have already seen, the authoritarian

[1] Salwa Ismail, 'Changing Social Structure, Shifting Alliances and Authoritarianism in Syria,' in Fred Lawson, ed., *Demystifying Syria* (London: Saqi Books, 2009), 13. A similar sentiment can be found in Steven Heydemann's work on authoritarianism in Syria, in which he lays out the history of the development of authoritarianism in Syria, arguing that it was not solely a product of the 1960s and 1970s; see Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946-1970* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999).

tendencies of political administration have been manifest in some form or another in Syria for quite some time, from the time of the mandate through the years between 1946 and 1970, during which various factions within the country sought to concentrate power in their own hands by whatever means possible, often at the expense of internal and external alliances. As a sobering reminder of the chaotic legacy of French colonial rule in the country, Syria experienced five military coups during its first decade of independence, and ten before the rise of the Ba'th Party in 1963.[2] While each coup is indeed noteworthy in its own right, the sheer number of coups between 1949 and 1963 makes an analysis of this nature rather tedious and cumbersome. Therefore, the following chapter highlights a few of the more 'substantial' coups, with the direct purpose of displaying the authoritarian tendencies of post-Mandate Syrian politics.

The Coups of 1949

As mentioned, modern Syria was barely three years old when it experienced its first military coup, on 30 March 1949, when Colonel Husni al-Za'im, then chief of staff of the Syrian Army, ordered the arrest of President Shukri al-Quwwatli and other prominent members of the government. In a pattern common to most coups of this type, various detachments of the army loyal to Za'im surrounded the presidential palace in Damascus, the home of the prime minister, the state-run radio station, and other important governmental sites. After control of these locations had been secured, the 'new' government of Syria announced, over state radio, the reasons for the overthrow of the government, which essentially amounted to allegations of corruption and

[2] George Haddad provides a thorough analysis of these various coups, which include several 'abortive' coups along with their more successful counterparts in his materful *Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States*, Vol. 2, Part 1 (New York: Robert Speller and Sons, 1971).

incompetence against the previous regime. Some have suggested that a significant factor among Za'im's supporters' desire for the overthrow of the Quwwatli government was widespread resentment over the Arab failure in the war in Palestine in 1948 (a similar sentiment would later be seen in the aftermath of the 1967 War), but according to George Haddad "It is not certain, however, that Colonel Za'im and the officers who made the coup acted out of patriotic concern about…the weakness displayed by the Quwwatli regime in Syria." In reality, "the authors of the coup, as it seems, were rather motivated by self-interest and they exploited the unrest that followed the disastrous war to their own advantage."[3]

According to Haddad, Za'im's government was characterized by heavy-handed personal rule, and, as many 'new' dictators are prone to do, most of his early efforts were directed at gaining internal legitimacy, especially since Faris al-Khoury, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, was convinced that the coup was a direct affront to the constitution. Interestingly, in the best interests of the country, Khoury agreed to help Za'im obtain legitimacy from various factions within Syria.[4] Remarkably, this first effective change of government in post-Mandate Syria came about with little or no bloodshed, and was favored, in part, by the younger generations of nationalists who had grown wary of the 'old guard,' so to speak. For the time, some of the reforms enacted by his regime were quite progressive, including the granting of equal voting rights to women and removing Islam's status as religion of the state, yet Za'im's foreign policy, according to the *Middle East Journal* in 1949, was "good-intentioned," but lacked a discernible

[3] Ibid., 197.
[4] See Ibid., 198-200.

"shrewdness and diplomacy."[5] For example, tensions soon rose over his willingness to allow Turkish officers to oversee the development of the Syrian Army and over rumors of significant French and American involvement; the latter would likely have stipulated some sort of agreement with Israel.[6] There is a rather pervasive notion that Za'im was in fact on the payroll of the United States Department of State, in contrast to the position taken up by Quwwatli, who had previously affirmed his desire to pursue Syria's interests, "even if it meant defying America."[7] Perhaps because the had previously planned his own movement against the government before 1949, Za'im was described as "power crazy" by Miles Copeland, who noted that "He desired power for the wrong reasons. He liked the prerequisites and ego satisfactions of being the boss."[8]

Unfortunately for Za'im and his followers, the regime was short-lived. Haddad provides an excellent summary of why Za'im was unlikely ever to have been able to retain power for any significant amount of time: "The readiness of a military dictator to make changes and reforms is not in itself sufficient to consecrate his leadership or legitimize his usurped rule or insure him for continuous general approval,"[9] A significant problem with the Za'im coup is that it was viewed by many of his contemporaries as reactionary, though Haddad suggests otherwise, as a direct response to criticisms over the failure of the military in the war in Palestine, which was manifest in threats to cut military spending, limited military demobilization, and a drastic cut in officers' pay. To the military officers like Za'im this was seen as nothing more than political meddling in military affairs. Thus, when he lost the support of the military, Za'im had little chance of

[5] *Middle East Journal* 3, No. 4 (Oct. 1949): 442-443.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Quoted in Moubayed, *Damascus between Democracy and Dictatorship*, 13.
[8] Quited in Ibid., 14.
[9] Haddad, 201.

retaining power. Furthermore, he developed a strong internal security apparatus that he often used against his own government, and systematically alienated those on whom he depended for his retention of power, namely religious leaders, businessmen, politicians and, as stated, army officers.[10] Though it may have started with decent intentions, it soon became clear to many that Za'im's regime was not exactly what it had set out to be.

"Husni Za'im passed from the Syrian scene as unexpectedly as he had appeared upon it."[11] These words, from 1949, can be applied to the haphazard and spontaneous nature of military coups in post-Mandate Syria. The motivations behind those who ousted Za'im in August 1949, led by Sami al-Hinnawi, may have been encouraged by regional actors wishing for a more 'friendly' Syria, but according to the actors themselves, Za'im had to go for a number of other reasons. Thus, in much the same way as had happened a few months earlier, on 14 August 1949 armored troops occupied military and police headquarters in Damascus, the state radio station, arrested Za'im, his chief of military police, Ibrahim al-Husayni and the prime minister, Muhsin al-Barazi. Shortly thereafter, Za'im and Barazi were executed. Almost immediately, the new Hinnawi regime set about demonizing its predecessors, a tactic often seen in the consolidation of power in authoritarian regimes, and criticized Za'im as despotic, wicked, and incompetent. In its first communiqué, the new regime declared it had saved Syria from tyranny, and promised that the military would return to the barracks.[12]

In comparison to the personal and authoritarian ambitions of Za'im, Hinnawi appeared far less interested in ruling as his predecessor had. He called for an interim government to draft a new constitution, and for the first time the Ba'th Party was

[10] See *Middle East Journal* 3 (Oct. 1949): 316-317.
[11] Ibid., 316.
[12] Found in Haddad, 205.

incorporated into the Syrian government, with Michel Aflaq as Minister of Education. Many groups within Syria favored some sort of union with Iraq, and Iraqi delegates began making trips to Damascus, in a complete reversal of the policy regarding Iraq that had existed under Za'im. The talks about union with Iraq did not last long, as in December of 1949, the third time in less than a year, another military coup replaced the Syrian government.

The third coup, led by Colonel Adib Shishkali, is widely accepted as being a reaction to the talks of union with Iraq, and despite efforts to raise support among leading army officers, those in positions of power refused to cooperate and acknowledge the agenda of the People's Party (*Hizb al-Sha'b*) and its favoritism towards the land-owning aristocrats of northern Syria. In a wearingly familiar pattern, armed battalions seized strategic offices in Damascus, arrested Hinnawi and his supporters and took effective control of the state. In a move not yet seen in previous coups, Shishkali allowed the civilian government headed by Hashim al-Atasi to continue operating, but he refused to grant them the authority to conduct affairs on their own, and kept close tabs on their activities. While it may not have amounted to the obvious spy mechanism implemented by Za'im, this form of military control over the government remained a constant throughout the later years of Syrian political life.

The 1958 Coups and the UAR: Authoritarianism from Abroad

The precursors to the coup that led to the union with Egypt and the subsequent domination by Nasserist politics were two coups directly related to the policies and rule of Shishkali. While he was successful in overthrowing Hinnawi, Shishkali went further, and on 28 November 1951 ordered the arrests of the members of a parliament he himself

had ordered created, and "government authority was weakened, civilian rule was discredited, and the parliamentary regime was corrupted."[13] If there were questions as to whether or not the military, and principally Shishkali, was in charge before November 1951, they were answered by December. This new personal rule, however, lasted only four years,[14] as by 1954 there was enough political opposition to supplant Shishkali and the military commanders outside of Damascus, where most of his more vocal opponents were located, which essentially forced Shishkali to resign, as he feared civil war.[15] There is perhaps no better way to describe the authoritarian tendencies of Shishkali's rule than by the words of Syrians themselves; in a broadcast over Aleppo Radio, his opponents lamented:

> He launched a ruthless war against the people, he stuffed mouths with iron and fire, ruled the people with whips and bullets, and used the most vile and beastly measures of oppression against anyone who dared to make any utterance…He sewed up the country with a wide, terrifying spy-network. He tore the army asunder. A senior officer began to fear his most junior men, least they be spying on him. Finally, Shishkali wanted us, the soldiers, to be slaves in satisfying his blood lusts….We announce that Shishkali is an aggressor and usurper, that his rule is not lawful, and we invite the people to set up their adored, popular, republican regime with their own hands and entirely by their own will.[16]

Though he may have considered that his own rule was in the best interests of Syria, his opponents saw him as an authoritarian tyrant fueled by a lust for power. The self-appointed republic proclaimed by the revolutionary communiqué did indeed come to fruition, but, following the established trend, only lasted a short time and was brought to an end by another coup in 1958 that led directly to union with Egypt.

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[13] Haddad, 210.
[14] Though it may seem short, before Shishkali no military ruler had managed to stay in power for a longer period of time.
[15] See Haddad 216-217. In his resignation letter, Shishkali wrote that he wished "to avoid shedding the blood of the people whom I love…", quoted in Moubayed, 99.
[16] Quoted in Moubayed, 99-100.

The United Arab Republic

In his recent book on the rise and fall of Arab nationalism, Adeed Dawisha asserts that the dissolution of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1961 after Syria's secession was a "significant fracture" in the "seemingly impregnable armor" of Arab nationalism.[17] Some three years earlier, the unity between Syria and Egypt had been hailed as presaging the birth of an Arab nation, one that would soon incorporate more of the surrounding independent Arab states. Gamal Abd al-Nasser was severely shaken by the breakup, describing the event as more devastating to the principles of Arab nationalism than the tripartite attack against Egypt during the Suez Crisis in 1956.[18] As well as being distraught over the loss of Syria, Nasser felt that the greatest blow came from the confidence that the episode had given to the more vocal and radical opponents of Arab nationalism. Interestingly, he chose to continue to refer to his country as the UAR, stressing that he would continue to carry the nationalist torch "vigorously and purposefully":

> The United Arab Republic, firmly convinced that she is an integral part of the Arab nation, must propagate her call for unity and the principles it embodies, so that it would be at the disposal of every Arab citizen, without hesitating for one moment before the outworn argument that this would be considered an interference in the affairs of others.[19]

"The United Arab State is a democratic, independent, sovereign Republic, and its people are part of the Arab Nation."[20] So began the Provisional Constitution of the United Arab Republic, a document signifying the union between Egypt and Syria, a

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[17] Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003), 232.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Quoted in Ibid., 233.
[20] United Arab Republic, 'Provisional Constitution of the United Arab Republic', found in Arab Information Center, U.S., *Basic Documents of the Arab Unifications* (New York: Arab Information Center, 1958), 10.

union believed to be the first step towards the formation of an even larger Arab nation-state. While the two states were officially united on February 1, 1958, the roots of the unification date back several years. Syrians, including Nasserist politicians as well as Ba'th party members, were the initial proponents of the unification and desired it for a variety of reasons, mostly, as could be expected, fairly opportunistic ones. As early as 1956, Syrian political parties had adopted and passed several resolutions calling for unification with Egypt and according to Monte Palmer, distinct factors influenced Syrian politicians to move towards unification. First, elites, both military and political, were experiencing increased pressure both from the communists and parts of the Syrian political right; second, the diffusion of power within Syria, and especially within the military, had resulted in an impasse that made action by any one group extremely difficult, if not impossible; third, the 'masses' were restive and had manifested considerable desire for unification with Egypt; fourth, many of Syria's principal political actors were emotionally invested in the Arab nationalist movement; and finally, Syrian elites were confident that they would emerge as the dominant force in the new Middle East.[21]

While the impetus for *unification* originated with Syrian elites, the first push for increased *cooperation* between the two states was largely an Egyptian product. Egypt sought cooperation with Syria to counter the Baghdad Pact, which had been passed in 1955 and provided for cooperation between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and Great Britain. By late 1955, however, the Syrians had become the principal proponents of integration, but to their displeasure, Egypt initially proved unwilling, as Nasser was

[21] Monte Palmer, 'The United Arab Republic: An Assessment of its Failure', in *Middle East Journal* 20, no. 1 (Winter, 1966): 51.

hesitant to agree to anything that could possibly compromise Egyptian sovereignty.[22] In 1956, a new Syrian government was formed by Sabri al-'Asali, this time without any sort of military coup. This new government included members of the Ba'th party, which had demanded that the pursuit of an Egyptian-Syrian union should become a top priority. Additionally, Arab nationalist factions within the Syrian Army began to demand unification, and after an extensive debate the Syrian Chamber of Deputies endorsed the initiative of pursuing unification with Egypt.[23] The Suez Crisis in 1956 halted the Syrian push for unification, but by 1957 there were several renewed attempts by the Syrian government to persuade Nasser to agree to it.

In late 1957, the Military Command Council was established in Syria to act as a "self-appointed guardian" of Syrian independence and neutralism.[24] When it decided to send a delegation to Egypt to seek unification, it did so largely in response to civilian demands. Another strong push came from the Ba'th Party, which, as a self-proclaimed promoter of Arab nationalism, could have no other choice, unless it wished to act contrary to its own ideology**.** For some Syrians, unity with Egypt had become the only way to ensure unity within Syria itself, and they needed Nasser's broad appeal to help them regain some sort of political stability.[25] On the other hand, most, if not all, of Nasser's closest supporters in the Egyptian government advised him against agreeing to unification with Syria as intelligence officers offered up a "gloomy prognosis" of Syrian stability, emphasizing the 'inordinate' power of Syria's military officers and their eagerness to interfere in politics, and recent events gave them plenty of evidence for this

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[22] James Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism and the United Arab Republic* (London : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 101.
[23] Ibid., 101-102.
[24] Ibid., 104.
[25] Dawisha, 193.

claim. Furthermore, some Egyptian officials tried to convince Nasser that the two countries were politically incompatible, as Syria had long espoused a multiparty system while Egypt had banned political parties in favor of the National Union.[26] When the fact that the two countries shared no geographical border was added to the potent mix of discontent and outright opposition to the project on the part of many Syrians, unification seemed a daunting, impractical, and almost impossible task as its relatively swift failure was indeed to show.[27]

If the Syrians thought they would have an equal hand in the formation of the UAR, they were to be sorely mistaken. From the beginning the union was dominated by Egypt, Nasser in particular, as a series of demands were presented to Syrian officials. One demand was the removal of the Syrian military from politics, and a more significant one, which had certainly been expected, was the stipulation that all political parties in Syria were to be disbanded and outlawed, as they had been in Egypt. Thus, the Ba'th Party, long the champions of Arab nationalism in Syria would essentially have to withdraw from politics to achieve an ideological goal they had ardently pursued for the whole of their political existence. Interestingly, Syria's president, Shukri al- Quwwatli, who had returned to Syrian politics and succeeded Hashim al-Atassi after being ousted by Za'im in 1949, cautioned Nasser as they met to formalize the agreement, warning him that he had "taken a people all of whom consider themselves politicians", half of whom think they are leaders, a quarter of whom think they are prophets, and ten percent of

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[26] Of course, Egypt's ban on political parties was highly attractive to the Ba'thists; while they would evidently have to dissolve themselves, this would also be the fate of the Communists, whom the Ba'thists both feared and hated. Similar arguments were to be put forward by 'Abd al-Salam 'Arif and his Ba'thist and Arab nationalist allies in Iraq after July 1958, also in efforts to trump the Communists. It is of some interest that after seizing power himself in 1963, 'Arif made no significant moves to resurrect the possibility of an Egyptian-Iraqi union, although he was evidently in a position to do so.

[27] Ibid., 196.

whom consider themselves to be gods. Nasser replied succinctly: "Why didn't you tell me this before I signed the agreement?"[28]

The constitution of the UAR asserted that nationality was defined by public law, and that UAR nationality was given to all Syrian and Egyptian nationals. Furthermore, social solidarity was the basis of the UAR and all citizens were equal before the law.[29] Nasser was elected president of the UAR, and Chapter III of the constitution outlines the responsibilities of the executive, emphasizing the idea that "Executive Power is vested in the President of the Republic, and he exercises it in the manner prescribed by the Constitution."[30] Also of importance was Article 64, which stated that Cairo was to be the capital of the UAR.[31] Essentially, Nasser was given control over the decision- making process and the formation of the administration. He was able to appoint the vice president(s) and state ministers, issue laws when the national assembly happened to be out of session, and controlled the armed forces. Although a national assembly was stipulated in the constitution, the president (Nasser) was able to select and appoint whomever he wished.[32] Essentially, Nasser had almost total control over the newly formed republic, which could easily have been considered a type of 'Greater Egypt.'

The Demise of the UAR

The stultifying and eventually unbearable Egyptian dominance of the UAR was not lost on the Syrians who had pushed for unification. One reason for the growing discontent among Syrians was that unification with Egypt, while ostensibly a major

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[28] Quoted in Jankowski, *Nasser*'s *Egypt*, 114.
[29] See ' Provisional Constitution,' 11.
[30] Ibid., 16.
[31] Ibid., 19.
[32] See Constitution and Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt*, 115.

manifestation of Arab nationalist sentiment, was merely the lesser of two evils, although better than the various possibilities outlined above.[33] Once the pressures from the communists and other political factions in Syria were reduced, the Ba'thists and other political actors, now without organized parties, moved to express their dissatisfaction with the Egypt-centric nature of the unification. Furthermore, Syrian elites, especially the Ba'thists, were surprised to learn that political parties would *actually* be disbanded and that they were essentially unable to operate, even as clandestine groups. They had hoped that it was merely a threat by Nasser intended to further the concept of political unity between the states. Another significant factor was that Syrians felt as though they were being fobbed off with the less desirable positions, in essence an insult to their Syrian identity and status as social elites. Egyptian ministers dominated the more prestigious posts within Syria, positions Syrian elites believed were rightfully theirs: at one time Egyptians occupied over half of the positions within the Syrian Ministry of Industry. Syrians also became disenchanted with the massive centralization process and many of them felt as though they were being deliberately bypassed in any decision-making process. Finally, a large number of Syrian officials and officers (including the future president Hafiz al-Asad) were relocated to Cairo, a process they viewed as nothing more than political exile as they often complained of being placed in charge of menial and tedious tasks that had nothing to do with their expertise.[34]

The complaints of the Syrians were not completely dismissed by their Egyptian counterparts. Rather, Egyptian actors often sought to justify these complaints and asserted that Egypt had more technicians and engineers than Syria (and relative to

[33] See Palmer, 55.
[34] Ibid., 55-56.

population size it may well have had), so that the presence of qualified Egyptians in Syria was actually necessary for integration to succeed. The Egyptians also claimed that the Syrian Army was in relative disarray due to the presence of numerous internal factions, while the close proximity of Damascus to the Israeli border made the presence of Egyptian military officers and personnel necessary for national security purposes. The transfer of Syrian officials to Egypt was attributed to the lack of training of Syrian military officials, and again related to the need for national security.[35]

Perhaps the most significant explanation of the failure of the UAR relates to the failure of Arab nationalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s as well. Simply put, the formation of the UAR, while it was often characterized in this way, never really had the chance to fulfill the desires of Arab nationalists. Its failure speaks to the inability of Arab nationalism to mobilize and institutionalize the various elements emphasized by thinkers such as Sati al-Husri, especially the commonality of language. Of course, both Egyptians and Syrians spoke Arabic, but language was never really a driving force behind the unification; it was simply a component of ideology. Furthermore, Egyptians questioned the content of the ties between the two states, suspecting that they lacked sufficient philosophical, political, social, and economic commonalities to completely and successfully unite.[36] Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal explained this idea clearly: "There were not, in fact, sufficient, necessary and effective ties between the Syrian and Egyptian Arab people to establish immediate unity…except one thing—Jamal Abd al-Nasir…One person is not enough to make unity." Syrians also echoed this sentiment, and as Aflaq noted: "The level of consciousness among the majority of the people and popular

[35] Ibid., 56-57.
[36] Ibid.

movements in the two countries lacked maturity and order. Many people entered these unity movements for parochial reasons, without willingness to bear the full burden and responsibility. This attitude encouraged deviation."[37]

Regardless of the various opinions of Egyptians and Syrians, the fact remains that the UAR failed to evolve into the grand project of Arab unity it was supposed to be. A feud between ʻAbd al-Hamid Sarraj and ʻAbd al-Hakim ʻAmr turned into a battle for political supremacy, and early on 28 September 1961 Sarraj's dissident forces had confined ʻAmr and the Syrian military regional command in Damascus. By noon, the city was entirely under the control of the dissidents, and by October 3, the coup had spread north to Aleppo.[38] Nasser, "the preeminent figure in the Arab political universe," faced an unforeseen obstacle, and is said to have referred to September 28, 1961 as one of the most difficult days of his life.[39]

1963 and the Rise of the Ba'th Party

Throughout the last three centuries in Syria, there has perhaps been no more influential political movement than the Ba'th Party. But, as has been noted concerning other elements of Syrian politics, the modes of exploitation and dominance employed by the Ba'th were in place before they came to power in 1963. According to Steven Heydemann, "By the end of the union [with Egypt] most of the institutions and practices associated with populist authoritarianism in Syria were in place," as redistributive state policies and a bureaucratic apparatus intended to increase the peasants' and workers' share of national income had been introduced. A great deal of private ownership had also

[37] Quoted in Ibid., 58-59.
[38] Jankowski, *Nasser's Egypt*, 166-167.
[39] Ibid., 170. Jankowski also asserts that Nasser supposedly contemplated resigning as President of the UAR after Syria's secession, but decided to remain in power, and not evade his responsibility.

been transferred to the state, and there was a marked increase in the role of the public sector in the mobilization of state capital.[40]

Interestingly, after Syria's sudden withdrawal from the UAR, a move encouraged by the more conservative factions within the Syrian officer corps, governmental authority was handed over almost immediately to a civilian government made up of several leading figures from the deposed 'old guard' government of 1958.[41] This 'new' civilian government, however, was short-lived, like so many of its predecessors. One would be right to question why the Ba'th Party would agree to the formation of union with Egypt, given that Nasser had banned political parties in Egypt, and included the same stipulation for the UAR.[42] Despite these supposed restrictions, during the union the Syrian Ba'th Party was able to develop and refine several of the tenets that would characterize its rule in the coming years. According to Heydemann, one of the most important 'long-standing attributes' of the Ba'th Party that emerged during the UAR was the "rise of the cooperative movement among rural labor an the reorganization of agricultural production."[43] There were extensive land redistribution projects, the extension of organizational and economic rights to peasants and nonelites, and, perhaps most characteristic of a watchful, authoritarian regime, the creation of numerous state agencies whose sole purpose was to oversee development and production in the countryside.

To echo Heydemann, it is often held that the union with Egypt was an interruption in the linear progression of authoritarian rule that took hold in Syria after 1946. Rather, one should see the union with Egypt as a different form of this authoritarianism, one that

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[40] Ibid., 130-131.
[41] Heydemann, 130.
[42] Although this stipulation was instrumental in ridding the Ba'th of the Communists, by far their most formidable opponents.
[43] Ibid., 132.

created new social and political structures that were readily available for the Ba'th Party to utilize and exploit. In its attempt to further reorganize and restructure Syrian politics the secessionist government adopted and adapted the top-heavy structure of the unionist government. In essence, this 'new' government attempted to rebuild Syria through developing the private sector, "[y]et they pursued this aim not by rejecting the authority of Nasserist rule but by appropriating and adapting the state-centric, authoritarian, and corporatist practices of the United Arab Republic."[44]

The Lion of Damascus: Hafiz al-Asad

The classic work of Patrick Seale is an excellent source on the life of Hafiz al-Asad.[45] Asad, whose full name was Hafiz ibn 'Ali ibn Sulayman al-Asad, was born 6 October 1930 to an 'Alawite family in Qardaha, a small town near Latakia, in northern Syria. He attended a school in Latakia when he was nine and by 1942 he was one of the few young men of his age in the region to take the necessary exams for the primary school certificate.[46] Later, at the age of twenty-one**,** he entered the subsidized military academy at Homs, from which he would emerge as a lieutenant in the Syrian Air Force.[47] During the French Mandate, many of Syria's less affluent families sent their sons away to military academies, as they were much cheaper, and after independence fees for these academies were often greatly reduced, or as was the case in Homs, completely eliminated. Furthermore, under French control, a significant number of minorities were

[44] Ibid., 135-137.
[45] Seale, *Asad.*
[46] See Seale, *Asad*, 11-14. Seale narrates the early life of Asad, noting the various influences his father and grandfather had on the young man, especially a love of books, the Arabic language, and poetry.
[47] When Asad entered the military academy, there was no Syrian Air Force, merely a flying school. Seale describes Asad's choice to chose the flying school as a result of his 'keenness to fly.' Seale, *Asad*, 39-40.

recruited or conscripted into the *Troupes Spéciales du Levant,*[48] yet after the abrupt French departure virtually no military structure remained. However, minority populations, especially ‘Alawite, made up a significant portion of the remaining forces, and when these junior officers asked for volunteers, men much like themselves answered the call.

In his detailed study on Syria’s peasants and ‘lesser notables,’ Hanna Batatu poses, and answers, a very pertinent question: “What made possible the political dominance of ‘Alawi officers in the second half of the 1960s and in subsequent decades, when the numbers of their community assed up to less than one-eighth of Syria’s population?”[49] Batatu further shows that prior to 1963 Sunnis were more prevalent in the officer corps than ‘Alawis, but ‘Alawi strength came principally from the minority’s massive presence in the lower ranks of the army. Asad’s rise to power, despite the fact that he hailed from a rural village in the north and was a member of the ‘Alawi minority, became a living symbol of the dynamic nature of Syrian politics and the encompassing nature of the Ba‘th Party. He joined the Ba‘th in 1946, when it was still just a political ‘movement’ yet to be coalesced into a political party, and immediately became immersed in the organizations ideology and practice. The party gained extreme popularity in Latakia, where the Asad family moved in 1949, and Asad emerged as a leading younger member. 1951 saw him elected as president of the nationwide Union of Syrian Students, which, as Seale notes, was “a notable first for himself, his party and his community.”[50] He was especially prone to forging street alliances among both minority and Sunni

[48] No less than three of the eight infantry battalions in the *Troupes* consisted either entirely of ‘Alawi soldiers or were mostly ‘Alawi. See Hanna Batatu, *Syria’s Peasantry, The Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 158.
[49] Ibid.,157.
[50] Seale, *Asad*, 36-37.

groups, and often challenged the more reserved role of other party members, as well as the traditional role instilled on him by his rural upbringing. He was involved in several altercations with Latakia's chapter of the Muslim Brethren, one of which left him with a knife wound that took weeks to heal. Essentially, he felt part of the Ba'th because the Ba'th espoused the characteristics of the young Asad: he was a minority, secular, and aggressive.[51]

Asad was part of the delegation sent to Cairo, and after the breakup of the UAR he was imprisoned by the Egyptians for forty days before he was released in exchange for Egyptians detained in Syria. According to Seale, after returning to Syria, Asad set about determining how he and his fellow military officers could seize control of Syria, which they believed to be headed toward inevitable chaos. In 1962, Asad was a "full time conspirator" as he and the Ba'th Military Committee planned a military coup of their own. They sought ought reliable allies among the more senior officer corps, which, thanks in large part to the disastrous three years with Egypt, was hardly in a state of cohesion. The young committee offered leadership to Colonel Ziyad al-Hariri, and as he was about to be stripped of his post and relegated to a post in Baghdad, he accepted. Though they were merely young men, who at the time possessed no political clout in Ba'thist circles, the Military Committee decided that it was its turn to take control of Syria.

While the government that immediately preceded the Ba'th takeover, that of President Nazim Qudsi and his Prime Minister, Khalid al-Azm, came to power through what Haddad has termed a "peculiar, peaceful coup," the same cannot be said of the coup carried out by pro-union Nasserist and Ba'thist groups in March 1963. The leader of the

[51] Ibid., 36.

coup, Colonel Ziyad Hariri, like many of his predecessors was characterized by an "adventurous spirit," "self-conceit," and a "burning desire to exercise power."[52] In the already-established pattern, military units occupied Damascus early in the morning of 8 March 1963, blocked entrance to the city, took control of the radio station, and took control of police headquarters and other key government buildings. By 6:20 AM, the coup had been announced to the country on state radio. The role played by pro-union elements within Syrian society, as well as the role played by Egypt and Nasser personally can be seen in the orders given to Egyptian military units to be on alert should the Syrian revolutionaries ask for help, and the rather upfront warning to Jordan, Israel, and Saudi Arabia that "any outside aggression on Syria is an aggression against the United Arab Republic."[53]

Pro-Nasserist agitation, and a rising fear of Sunni incursions into the high ranks of the Army led to further military intervention and subsequent coups, and in 1966, together with Salah Jadid, his future political rival, Hafiz al-Asad and the military faction of the Ba'th party were growing even more critical of the civilian wing of the Ba'th political machine. In February Jadid and his officer corps seized control of the government. The intraparty rivalry that existed within the Syrian Ba'th is a telling feature of the nature of the military influence on Syrian politics; as Maniruzziman notes, "It was the gun that controlled the Syrian Ba'th Party and not vice versa."[54] Interestingly, after his successful takeover at the expense of the civilian wing of the Ba'th, it was Jadid himself who chose to ally with the civilian sector when tensions rose between himself and Asad, essentially

[52] Haddad, 295. It is interesting to note that the coup in Syria took place almost exactly one month after a similar Ba'thist coup occurred in Iraq.
[53] Quoted in Haddad, 299.
[54] Talukder Maniruzziman, *Military Withdrawal from Politics: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1987), 34.

creating two factions within Syrian politics. Asad soon began to use his position as Minister of Defense to consolidate his power over the military, a vital ingredient of authoritarian rule. He forcefully removed Jadid's supporters from powerful positions within the military, perhaps most notably the Chief of Staff**,** Ahmad al-Suwaydani. Asad did not stop with the removal of Jadid's supporters; he subsequently placed his close friend, Mustafa Tlas,[55] in al-Suwaydani's old position. In a further attempt to consolidate his power over the military, Asad removed Colonel 'Izzat Jadid, commander of Syria's 70th Armored Brigade (the main strike force) and Jadid's relative, subsequently appointing a new colonel loyal to his regime.[56]

By the end of 1968 Asad had consolidated his power over the military, but Jadid still controlled the intelligence and security forces through the loyalty of 'Abd al-Karim al-Jundi. Under Jundi, the state's "apparatus of repression" had expanded to never-before-seen levels as arbitrary arrests and rumors, as well as the actual practice**,** of torture had become commonplace throughout Syria. Early in 1969, Asad's quest to consolidate power resulted into a conflict over control of the security and intelligence forces. His younger brother Rif'at controlled one of the state security forces, and after learning of a possible assassination attempt against his older brother, he decided to act and convinced his older brother to remove Jundi from his position. In February 1969, the Asad brothers strategically removed the editors of the government and party newspapers, replacing them with their own loyal followers. Simultaneously, Asad's forces removed Jadid's supporters from their government and party offices throughout the capital. Fearing that his own tactics of interrogation and torture would soon be turned on him, Jundi

[55] Tlas and Asad had met at the Homs Military Academy in 1951, and they remained close friends, see Seale, *Asad*, 148-149.
[56] Ibid, 149.

committed suicide, thus ensuring Asad's consolidation of power over the intelligence and security forces.[57]

Asad's domination of the military as well as the security and intelligence apparatuses placed him in a position to carry out his 'Corrective Movement' in 1970, as did the extensive patronage network he had established, including placing his younger brother Rif'at in charge of many domestic institutions. While Rif'at was at times critical of his older brother's reluctance to capitalize on the advantage he had gained by consolidating power over the military and security forces, he was eventually satisfied when, on 13 November, 1970 Asad ordered the systematic arrests of his opponents the day after the close of the Ba'th Party congress.[58] Asad offered Jadid a position in a Syrian embassy abroad (which was typically viewed as a position of defeat and humiliation) and Jadid refused, threatening Asad if he were ever to return to power.[59]

As soon as Asad began the arrests of his opponents, he began to ensure that he would retain the power he had gained in the 'coup.' The 'Corrective Movement' is notable because there was relatively little bloodshed, and Asad's men were able to trap their opponents, in his words, "like rabbits in their beds."[60] During this coup, Asad began to plant the seeds of his authoritarian rule by placing his close friends and allies in key positions, and most of his close friends and associates played some role in his seizure of power. Rif'at took charge of security in Damascus and Mustafa Tlas and another close

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[57] Ibid., 149-52. Rif'at came to believe in the assassination attempt after a suspicious car was seen lingering near Asad's residence, and after intense interrogation the driver confessed Jundi had ordered Asad's assassination. The methods of interrogation, while not explicitly explained, leave doubts as to the legitimacy of the confession,

[58] Interestingly, on 12 November, the congress passed resolutions detailing the party's loyalty to Jadid's government while simultaneously criticizing Asad and Tlas for "improper military influence in running the country", see Maniruzziman 34-35.

[59] Seale, *Asad*, 164.

[60] Quoted in Ibid.

friend, Colonel Naji Jamil, ensured that Asad would face no resistance from within the military. Muhammad al-Khali, another close friend, performed the task of rounding up Jadid's supporters in the military, government ministries, and from within the Ba'th party offices. An interesting aspect of this takeover is that at least initially it seemed that the general population was hardly aware of what had been happening since November 13, perhaps because no tanks had filled the streets, and the markets were open and seemed to be functioning normally. Asad was careful to control the media, which eventually caused some Syrians and observers in other parts of the world to begin to try to figure out exactly what was happening inside Damascus. Asad was careful to make sure his takeover went as smoothly as possible, and he took his time tying up loose ends and forming a new Provisional Regional Command before making any public announcement. Asad had gained regional 'legitimacy' when Libyan leader Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi arrived to meet Syria's new leader only a few days after the 'Corrective Movement.'[61]

Once Asad had taken power, he faced the difficult task of making sure he was able to hold on to it. The political instability that had allowed the numerous coups during the 1940s, 1950s, and the 1960s (as well as Asad's own takeover in 1970) was a critical factor in the decisions he made during the formative years of his rule. As mentioned, the Syrian population had become so disgusted with most of the regimes in power before Asad that it appeared as though *any* alternative was welcome. It seems likely that Asad knew this; perhaps fearful that similar disgust could arise in response to his rule, he desired to take whatever steps were necessary to ensure that a similar rebellion would and could not occur. Quoting Raymond Hinnebusch, Malik Mufti states that the formative years of the Syrian state under Asad eventually allowed him to rule as a "'presidential

[61] Ibid., 164-165.

monarch', ruling Syria virtually at will and without the constant fear of being overthrown that had consumed his predecessors."[62] As Mufti also states, Asad's rise to power was achieved by relatively 'conventional' means, his utilization of his control over the military being the most obvious. It would be erroneous to state that Asad created an entirely new system of government; various factions of the Ba'th Party had ruled Syria for some seven years before Asad in ways which had made Asad's seizure of power somewhat easier. One of the notable 'achievements' of the Ba'th Party in the 1960s was its ability to minimize and neutralize any political opposition, namely the communists, the Nasserists or pan-Arabists, and the Syrian Social National Party (SSNP).[63]

Soon after taking power, Asad embarked on a 'campaign' aimed at creating internal legitimacy for his rule. In an attempt to appeal to the considerable residue of nationalist and pan-Arab aspirations among the population, he announced that Syria would join the various union discussions taking place between Egypt, Libya, and Sudan, despite the fact that, as would later become apparent, he never had any serious interest in unification.[64] During or soon after his takeover, Asad strategically removed his opposition, notably Jadid and his supporters, from their positions in the government. After taking power, he attempted to co-opt various political opposition groups into his government, a tactic often employed by other Middle Eastern leaders. Over half the seats in his first cabinet were offered to non-Ba'th Party members, and he even went as far as to forge an alliance, however artificial, between the Ba'th and the communists and several smaller political parties in a National Progressive Front. Essentially, by including

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[62] Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 231.
[63] Ibid., 232-233. Also see Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946-1970* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).
[64] Mufti, 233.

the smaller 'opposition' parties within the government and the political foundations of the state, Asad hoped to limit their voices and influence outside the government, which might have possibly led to popular uprisings and the large-scale political mobilization of various parts of society. As in a comparable situation in Egypt, Asad's tactics were simple; by including the smaller opposition within the government, these groups found it difficult to exhibit public disapproval or criticize the Asad regime. However, not all his tactics relating to the opposition involved inclusion. In the early 1970s, the security forces, now under his personal control, systematically removed his more vocal opponents from *within* the Ba'th Party and the military. He and his followers saw these two groups (disgruntled Ba'th Party members and military personnel) as potential breeding grounds for more solid opposition to the regime, especially after the security forces successfully prevented two attempted coups against him in 1972 and 1973.[65]

Another way Asad was able to consolidate his power was by utilizing increased revenues from oil and from foreign aid,[66] which allowed him considerable leeway to strengthen his regime in a variety of ways. Military expenditure increased from $384 million in 1970 to over $3 billion in 1980, and at the same time the military nearly tripled in size.[67] The drastic increase in the budget and the size of the military was part of Asad's strategy to consolidate his power. During the military buildup, he began to develop his patronage networks within the upper echelons of the military as his regime rewarded military prowess and success more than political aptitude and performance. Perhaps fearing a coup against his regime, he also began to remove domestic security

[65] Ibid., 235.
[66] It should be noted that while Syria was not a major producer, oil revenues eventually made a significant contribution national income. See Mufti, *Sovereign Creations*, 235-236.
[67] Mufti, 236.

responsibilities from the military, giving them instead to loyal Ba'thists, most of whom were 'Alawis and close friends.[68]

Asad's consolidation of power extended beyond the military as he went about increasing the size and influence of the Ba'th Party—membership rose from some 35,000 members in 1968 to nearly 540,000 in 1984. The party opened new offices throughout the country, and there were attempts to entice previously less-recruited members of society, namely women, youth, and peasants. The regime also attempted to further its control of the country through new agrarian and educational policies. The more significant of these two was the attempt to use educational policies to foster loyalty to the Asad regime and the state. Almost all Syrian children of school age were enrolled in some form of public education by 1980.[69]

Foreign Policy and Power Consolidation

Some of the most interesting ways in which Asad and his regime went about securing and consolidating power occurred in foreign policy endeavors throughout the early years of his rule. As Volker Perthes argues, Asad's foreign policy and his domination of the military enabled him to transform Syria into a "strong security state."[70] As mentioned, he profoundly increased the size of the military and its budget, and the regime had to find a way to legitimize and maintain the new larger military force. This led Asad and his regime to pursue a more active foreign policy, one in which it "sought to impose its will on its neighbors, rather than the other way around."[71] As Perthes also points out, the main source of internal legitimacy for the Asad regime from the beginning

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid., 237.
[70] Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria Under Asad* (London, I.B. Tauris, 1995), 262.
[71] Mufti, 238.

was its regional position. The Syrian Ba'th Party had always presented Syria as the most ardent defender of Arab, especially Palestinian, rights, and also as the hub and rightful 'heartland' of pan-Arabist sentiment.[72] If the Asad regime had failed in this endeavor early on, the seeds of internal legitimacy it required for existence may never have been planted.

Thus, it is worth noting that one of Asad's earliest foreign policy decisions was to join the Egyptian attack on Israel on 6 October 1973. Obviously, it cannot be argued that Syria was victorious against Israel, but according to Mufti the October conflict served the Asad regime in ways it may not have imagined. Syria emerged sufficiently strong to block any resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict that did not explicitly take Syrian interests into account. Shortly thereafter, Asad used his new regional 'prestige', however real or unreal it was, to appeal to Jordan, Lebanon, and the PLO to avoid going the way of Egypt in signing a separate peace treaty with Israel.[73]

After the October conflict with Israel, Syria's newly expanded military continued to serve another purpose. As a result of the new position it occupied after the conflict, Syria achieved the status of being considered a "credible" regional opponent to Israel, which in turn led to its receiving substantial "strategic rent" from Russia and the wealthier Arab states. As Perthes points out, it is hard to imagine that Syria would have received such aid had Asad not expanded the military and taken his 'rejectionist' stance.[74] In this way the persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict greatly benefitted Asad in his quest to consolidate power. As long as Syria could maintain its status as a 'credible' enemy to Israel, there was no immediate need to look elsewhere to justify the existence and

[72] Perthes, 264.
[73] Ibid., 238-239.
[74] Perthes, 234.

maintenance of such a large military force. This strategic "no-peace-no-war" relationship allowed the Asad regime to continue the buildup of the military, while simultaneously securing the 'strategic rents' Syria received from its allies.[75]

What Opposition?

Recent events in Syria remind observers of the last time there was a significant opposition movement against the Syrian regime, specifically the uprising led by the Syrian faction of the Muslim Brotherhood in Hama in 1982. Early in the morning of February 3, a Syrian army unit was ambushed by a guerilla force led by 'Umar Jawwad (also known as Abu Bakr). After additional forces arrived, Jawwad ordered a massive uprising and called for *jihad* against Ba'th party members in Hama. Over seventy leading Ba'thists had been murdered during the conflict, and the regime faced a legitimacy crisis unlike any it had faced before. According to Seale, a general feeling of panic arose in Damascus after the Hama uprising, and "the regime itself shook."[76] Before the uprising in 1982, the regime had constantly battled the Islamist opposition in Hama, which had systematically confronted the Asad regime with accusations of illegitimacy. Asad and the regime decided that the conflict with the opposition in Hama was a "last-ditch battle" that, "one way or the other, would decide the fate of the country."[77]

It was generally understood that the Islamist opposition had to be completely destroyed in Hama, regardless of the moral and human cost of such an operation. The interesting aspect of this conflict is that it was not only a conflict between the regime and the opposition; it also boiled down to a religious conflict, as well a massive struggle for

[75] Ibid., 265.
[76] Seale, *Asad,* 332-333.
[77] Ibid., 333.

regime legitimacy. According to opposition discourse, Hama was 'invaded' by over 12,000 regime troops in the attempt to hunt down and destroy the opposition. The brutality employed by the regime was astounding; entire families were dragged into the streets and murdered, and numerous mosques, churches, and monuments were looted and destroyed. A telling statistic of the conflict is that the casualty estimates range from 3,000 (the number provided by government supporters) to some 20,000 (the number reported by government critics).[78]

Another explanation for the potency of the uprising in Hama falls along socio-economic lines. While it was, without a doubt, an event tainted with religious opposition, economic decisions made by the regime in 1981 had a significant impact on who became involved in the uprising. Fred Lawson asserts that as an increasingly larger percentage of Syria's cotton was pulled away from local industries toward the larger, state-run factories and export markets, the regime, specifically Prime Minister 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Kasm, was forced to implement new policies to benefit smaller businesses, but ultimately, local artisans were forced to bear the brunt of the price for these new policies under a new tax system.[79] Coincidentally or not, a majority of these artisans were Muslim, and perhaps motivated by Islamic ideals of fairness in economic dealings, they developed close ties with one another, as they began to oppose state coalitions and other industrial institutions they felt were treating them unfairly.[80]

In an attempt to appease those who saw the siege of Hama as a brutal act of violence carried out by a brutal regime, Asad ordered the rapid rebuilding of the city.

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[78] Seale, *Asad*, 333-334.
[79] Fred Lawson, 'Social Bases for the Hamah Revolt,' in *MERIP Reports*, No. 110, 'Syria's Troubles' (Nov. - Dec., 1982): 26-28.
[80] Ibid.

The regime spent a great deal of money in the reshaping of Hama, as new schools, clinics, playgrounds and shopping malls were constructed, as well as two large mosques and a large Catholic church to replace those destroyed in the siege. In an attempt to make the city less conservative than it had been before the 1982 uprising, mixed bathing was introduced and the first co-ed dormitory in Syria was constructed in 1983. Asad's brutal response to the Islamist opposition and the drastic restructuring of Hama that occurred afterwards displays a desperate attempt by the regime to eliminate a major source of opposition, while it simultaneously attempted "not just to erase the past but to change attitudes" as well.[81]

Another tactic of regime survival employed by the Asad regime involved how Asad and his followers portrayed the events in Hama in the media. Lisa Wedeen argues that the regime used "partial truth-telling" to paint a more acceptable picture of how the regime handled the bloody conflict. The rhetorical strategies employed by the regime established "both the authority of the Ba'th and its victimization at the hands of the enemy."[82] The regime painted the Islamist opposition as cowards who shot from the doors of mosques, and went as far as to define the Ba'th forces as "knights," stating that they acted with "national and revolutionary spirit." Various claims were made that the Muslim Brethren had sold themselves to the devil and that they "brutally killed all the citizens" who would not welcome them into their homes.[83] According to Wedeen, the regime's ability to "wax and wane" made it possible for Asad to be both the "omnipresent leader in charge of events that unify and bring glory to Syrians" and

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[81] Seale, *Asad,* 334..
[82] Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 46-47.
[83] Ibid., 46-48.

"absent from and innocent of events that are embarrassing or simply conflictual."[84] A short time after the events in February, Asad was supposedly acclaimed by over a million Syrians, and he subsequently condemned the violence of the Muslim Brethren, and warned Syrians to be wary of those who may appear to be, but are not, *true* Muslims.

The presentation of Asad as the 'omnipresent' leader was not limited to the events of Hama and the actions of the Muslim Brethren. Wedeen argues that the regime preferred compliance over legitimacy, and essentially sought compliance through a variety of authoritarian and controlling means. The Syrian constitution does not contain any provision that could possibly override the president's power, but the semblance of a system of political participation paints a picture more resembling democratic principles than its actual authoritarian nature. Further, the symbolic displays of power utilized by Asad's regime were intended to generate obedience. These practices included compulsory attendance at state spectacles, and other tactics "beyond the barrel of the gun and the confines of the torture chamber."[85] According to Wedeen, Asad's regime employed six specific tactics in its attempt to consolidate power and ensure domestic legitimacy; first, the regime produced "guidelines for acceptable speech and behavior"; second, it defined "a specific type of national membership"; third, it occasioned "the enforcement of obedience"; fourth, it induced complicity "by creating practices in which citizens are themselves 'accomplices,' " who upheld the norms of Asad's domination; fifth it isolated Syrians from each other; and sixth, it cluttered public space with "monotonous slogans and empty gestures."[86] All of these tactics were attempts to create internal legitimacy. Essentially, the regime did not really care if Syrians believed in all

[84] Ibid., 48.
[85] Ibid., 145, 156.
[86] Ibid., 6.

of the mystifications and praise of Asad; they were only required *to behave as if they did*, as the Syrian regime pursued "symbolic strategies" which were intended "not to induce charisma or belief, but rather to elicit *outward* signs of obedience."[87]

Conclusion

The referendum that ushered in the Bashar era of Syrian politics, though disputed, can very easily be seen as the first noncoup transition of power in Syria since 1949. During that span, Syria had undergone some seventeen coups, the last of which culminated in Hafiz al-Asad's seizure of complete power in 1970. Even then, when questions arose about his health, his brother Rif'at expressed a real interest in carrying out a coup of his own and seizing power for himself. The question that arises is what do these coups, and the significant number of them, tell us about the nature of authoritarianism in Syria? In fact, they point to the existence of a fairly weak state, one in which various initially fairly small groups are able to seize power relatively quickly, due to personal alliances and external pressures, as long as they have the support of a somewhat significant faction of the armed forces. The 'Corrective Movement' of 1970 is remarkable in its own right, as it established a regime that is still largely intact, although some of the faces may have changed.

What this analysis of the various military coups hopes to have shown is that the legacies of French colonial policy, and the destruction of pre-Mandate Syrian social and political structures, in which new alliances were formed, principally between the French and various 'friendly' minorities, led to a state of affairs ripe for constant military intervention. Only after 1970 was an authoritarian ruler able to consolidate complete

[87] Ibid., 29, my emphasis.

control over the armed forces, essentially eliminating any threat from within the regime, but Asad still had to contend with internal opposition. However, the sheer brutality of the response to the uprising in Hama leads one to believe that the Syrian regime no longer had anything to fear on the domestic front by the early 1980s. It effectively eliminated Islamist opposition to ‘Alawi rule, which by that time was so entrenched in the military wing of the regime that supplanting it would prove extremely difficult. The cult of personality constructed around Hafiz was a spectacle to behold, and as he proved with his handing of the aftermath of the events of Hama, he was a rather creative and adaptive leader.

Asad’s predecessors, like himself, were often power-hungry military officers, who whether they would admit it or not, were driven by a personal desire to lead Syria ‘in a new direction.’ Often, their ambitions were quickly quashed as they were ousted and replaced by coups, sometimes led by the very officers who had put them in their position. Some parliaments only lasted twelve hours, as seen with Shishkali’s successive coups first against Hinnawi and then against the parliament established by the civilian government he had allowed to remain. Perhaps the most interesting case of authoritarian rule experienced by Syria during this period came during its ill-fated union with Nasser and Egypt. Enticed by Nasser’s pan-Arabist rhetoric, and motivated by fear of the influence of communism, Syria’s Ba‘th party effectively pushed for its own dismissal. According to ‘Aflaq, the party does not seem to have been fully aware of the extent to which it would be required to subordinate itself to the new regime: “We [the Ba‘th Party] will be officially dissolved but we will be present in the new unified party, the National

Union. Born of the union of two countries, this movement cannot be inspired by principles other than those of the Ba'th."[88]

What was present in the union, however, was a noticeable domination by Egyptian officers and politicians, and of course Nasser was president. Rather than do away with the subordinating style of government engendered by the UAR, the postunion government essentially adopted much of the same structure as it pushed for more integration of the private sphere, only to see the Ba'th party exploit these same structures as it took power, first in 1963, and ultimately in the hands of the Asads after 1970. Throughout the thirty years of his rule, Hafiz proved extremely capable of handling both internal and external pressures, and used Syria's historic and politically strategic location to his utmost advantage. Though it would not have been entirely impossible without the drastic reordering of Syrian society and politics which had taken place under French 'tutelage,' a careful analysis of post-Mandate Syria indicates that the relative ease with which governments were supplanted and power was taken owes a great deal to what happened between 1920 and 1946.

[88] Quoted in John F. Devlin, 'The Baath Party: Rise and Metamorphoses,' in The American Historical Review 96 (5) (Dec., 1991): 1400.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: A HISTORICAL PATTERN?

Indeed, Hourani's reservations about dividing history into convenient periods are well warranted. There is no sense in which Syrian history from the Mandate to the Asads can be regarded as a single 'era.' Comparing the policies enacted by the French in response to growing discord with the Asad regime's unwillingness to lift the 1963 Emergency Law until 2011 without some explicit clarifications is a historical folly. Nevertheless, to understand the current state of Syrian politics, and its possible trajectory, it is important to look back at the broken promises and repressive ways by which the Allied Powers, in this case France, sought to impose their will on the 'liberated' states of the former Ottoman Empire.

In two years, Sharif Husayn of Mecca conducted 'negotiations' with both the British and the Ottoman Empire. The earlier correspondence between Husayn and the Ottoman officials Enver and Jamal Pasha should at least cast serious doubt on the 'traditional' Arab nationalist notion that the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire were struggling with all their might against the repressive Ottoman yoke. Shortly after pledging assistance to the Ottomans, and learning that money and weapons were on their way, Husayn made similar promises to Sir Henry McMahon and the British. Far from being an ardent promoter of nationalism, Husayn merely sought to ensure that his own

position and prominence were not threatened in Arabia, and to extend this influence as far as possible.

The attention paid to the correspondence with Istanbul, however, pales in comparison to the scrutiny leveled at the Husayn-McMahon correspondence that immediately followed it. It seems that Husayn began to believe that some form of self-rule was possible, though he responded to the initial letters with some hesitation. He characterized McMahon's initial response to his request for a completely independent Arab state as cool and detached, noting that McMahon had essentially avoided the idea altogether. However, by the time the correspondence had ceased, he seemed convinced of impending independence. But, as we have seen, the correspondence was virtually meaningless. The French and British had secretly devised a plan for dividing up the former Ottoman provinces, relegating specific regions to zones of 'influence' and 'direct control,' further stipulating that Palestine be placed under international supervision. The idea that an Ottoman collapse could allow Russia or Germany to gather a significant foothold in the former Ottoman provinces was a particularly unwelcome to both Britain and France. Thus both countries set about ensuring they would somehow control the future of the 'power vacuum' that would likely emerge after the Ottoman collapse. Though they supported different groups and had vested interests in different regions, both France and Britain wanted the Middle East. Despite its importance in ensuring that both parties would see their fears quelled and their aspirations realized, the Sykes-Picot agreement was disregarded, as were most of the prewar secret bargains.

One of the most damaging actions by the League of Nations after the war was its virtual disregard of the report of the King-Crane Commission. Although the survey it

conducted was hardly 'scientific', it was clear that a French Mandate was just about the last thing the people of Syria wished to see imposed upon them, and the number of those opposed to French rule number would likely have been even higher had they been able to see into the future and realize they were to be subjugated to military rule and martial law for much of the next twenty-five years. Again, let us return to Philip Khoury and his characterization of the problem of administering a country against the will of its inhabitants: "A small but tenacious group of Frenchmen…capitalized on the 'defensive patriotism' wrought by World War I to commit France to the military occupation of Syria in 1920. But, seizing Syria by force was one thing; governing the country was quite another."[1]

From the outset, those who carried out French policy in Syria saw their task as a benevolent civilizing mission. General Gouraud, who marched on Damascus in 1920 to impose the French Mandate, claimed Syria as one of France's 'many children,' and vowed to uphold the sacred mission outlined by the League of Nations. It is also interesting to examine the language of the various treaties and proclamations, taking note of the various ways in which it was implied that European society was clearly superior to Arab society**,** despite the region's rich cultural history.[2]

What kind of connections are there between the practices of the Mandate authorities and the state of Syrian politics in the latter half of the twentieth century? It is may be somewhat dubious to make such broad connections, but nonetheless they do exist. As has been shown, the 'Alawite predominance in the ranks of the Syrian military n be traced somewhat to French policies of enlisting the help of 'friendly' minorities, but

[1] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 44.
[2] Of particular value here is Edward Said's classic, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

this is by no means the only reason.[3] Batatu's detailed analysis shows that much of the 'Alawi domination of the military can be traced to their 'dominance' of the lower ranks of the military; they were never really in control until the 1960s, but the chaos and personal rivalries common to the higher ranking officers, provided Asad and his fellow junior officers with the opportunity they needed. Over time, however, the French grew increasingly wary of Sunni dominance in the country, and ultimately thought it best to have the more marginalized sections of Syrian society as its closest allies. As can be seen in the Great Syrian Revolt led by the Druze of Jabal Hawran, this policy also often led to fierce rivalries within these minority groups, thus further splintering French support.

It took the French authorities much longer than their British counterparts in Iraq to realize that direct control was perhaps not the best course of action. By the end of the 1920s, there was already a clear timetable for British withdrawal[4] but in Syria at the same time military rule and martial law characterized the political arena. Writing in 1917, Sir Arthur Hirtzel of the India Office in London expressed a sentiment familiar to officials of the time:

> The Turkish menace has apparently been removed. But another has taken its place, of a different kind, and one which, I think, makes it imperative for us to get to work. What I mean is that we must at least consider the possibility of a peace which will not give us the absolute political control of Mesopotamia that we should like to have.[5]

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[3] N.E. Bou-Nacklie has argued that French policy in this regard was incredibly sophisticated. French authorities did not simply recruit among a specific group, but rather from every group in an attempt to foster divisions among the populations: "their strategy was sophisticated and extended to the level of clientele groups within the larger groups." 'Les Troupes Spéciales: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-1946,' in *IJMES,* Vol. 25, No. 4 (Nov., 1993), pp. 645-660. Benjamin Thomas White has also asserted that the French attitude towards minorities was not purely political in its scope. He posits that there was a genuine humanitarian concern for minorities in Syria under the Mandate, especially those who had been previously displaced by the war or by Ottoman policies, especially the Armenians; 'The Nation-State Form and the Emergence of 'Minorities' in Syria,' in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 7, no. 1 (2007).
[4] See Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation-Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
[5] Quoted in Peter Sluglett, *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 15.

Demands made by the leaders of the revolt made their demands clear from the onset of the fighting; they wanted to determine their own future, and would accept the French only if they were relegated to a purely advisory role. These demands were utterly unacceptable to the French.

Thus, the opposition to French rule and the resultant actions taken by the Mandate authorities created an uncertain future for Syria. Attempting to find any *direct* connections between French rule and the frequency of coups in post-independence Syria would lead to a gross oversimplification of history. However, it is possible to find the legacies of the military rule that characterized the latter years of the Mandate in this period. Immediately after the departure of the French, there was virtually no military organization, and the French policy of recruiting almost exclusively among Syria's many diverse ethnic and cultural groups led to fierce battles for power among the emerging upper echelons.

The predominance of the 'Alawis, which, as Batatu has shown, did not emerge until well into the 1960s, can trace its roots to this period as well, as the new Syrian governments continued the process of heavily subsidizing military education, allowing Syrians from the rural areas to enter Syria's newly formed military academies. These regions, which also happened to be inhabited by families unlikely to be able to send their sons abroad for their education, proved to be the origins of a great deal of Syria's military elite, and at the very least provided a commonality among those who would soon become junior officers. Thus, by the end of the 1940s, Syria was well on the way to a chaotic state of affairs that would only be somewhat stabilized under the dictatorial rule of Hafiz al-Asad. Asad was able to do what none of his predecessors were able to do, namely to

remain in power for a significant amount of time, from 1970 to his death by natural causes in 2000. In spite of the length of time he remained in power, no stable institutions seem to have been created, and, in time, his son has inherited the harvest of the seething discontents brought on by his own and his father's dictatorial rule. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, chaos was the rule of law, as military governments replaced military governments, and civilian governments, when created, often did not last very long.

Ultimately, the end of the political chaos engendered by the illiberal and top-heavy practices of the Mandate came in the personage of Hafiz al-Asad. His prowess at building a loyal following, suppressing rebellion, and creating a substantial 'cult of personality' is remarkable. Though he surely faced challenges to his rule, even from his own brother, he clung to power and responded to the challenges with a degree of calculated brutality to an extent unparalleled in the modern history of Syria. He ordered the shelling of Hama, which destroyed a major portion of the city, yet was able to couch the action in terms placing the blame entirely upon his opposition. His intense intelligence network and strong, if largely ineffectual role, as the 'defender' of the Palestinians also allowed him to proceed virtually without any obstacles in his path. Though it is never the job of a historian to attempt to predict the future, it can be asserted that the state of modern Syria would most likely be quite different had the French pursued a policy more in-line with the desires of Syrians, which had been clearly laid out by the middle of the 1920s. Instead of listening, they sought to entrench themselves further, much as the Asad regimes have done, to the point that virtually no change was possible without total restructuring, which would itself require input from an opposition that the Asads have ensured does not exist in any functional institutional forms . As soon

as it became apparent that France could not hold on to power indefinitely, the situation in Syria became transformed into a drawn out episode of military rule and martial law that created a political environment ripe for the authoritarian rule that has characterized Syria for roughly sixty years.

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